

An Ethnography of Contested Return: Re-making Kozarac

Phd Dissertation

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Abstract

This PhD dissertation looks at the experience of a small returnee community in Kozarac, North-West Bosnia. It is a longitudinal study of a group of people who set out to reclaim their homes and rebuild their community after expulsion and violence at the hands of their neighbours. The aim is to investigate how these traumatic experiences were utilised as a motivational vehicle for the return, and how they influenced the character of the post-return community. The study also looks critically at the “memory industry” and trauma studies that claim to put the victim at the centre, but sometimes, through their intervention and focus on narrative, actually deprive their subjects of agency. Returning home is explored as a journey in which social actors actively seek to re-establish social and individual relations as part of a process of recovery, focusing on how they use rituals of mourning and remembering to do so.

The thesis centres around a qualitative case study based on several years of participatory observation. Avoiding interviews, my aim was to reach a deeper understanding of the communal everyday social practices and individual coping strategies in a place that continues to be burdened with the legacy of a violent past, embodied in its physical landscape and asymmetrical power relations. I also consider the international dimension to the locale, and the role of international actors, considering whether local power struggles are only the result of the war experience and a continuation of nationalist post-war politics, or whether the presence of international agencies may also have had “unanticipated consequences” in contributing to a lack of progress in Bosnian society.

The study draws from various anthropological sources on memory and social reconstruction, but also clinical and cognitive psychologists’ analyses of what the experience of forcible expulsion entails for an individual and their health. Whilst some studies have concluded that people have relocated within the country in search for safety and economic advantages within their own ethnic group, my findings illustrate that emotional ties to the original home, for the inhabitants of Kozarac, remain the key driver for return. However, the study also suggests that post-return, the Kozarac community has moved on to focus on other issues that will ultimately determine whether the community can be sustained over time.



Vandalised sign at the entrance to the town of Kozarac

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Abbreviations

ARBiH: The Army of Bosnia and Hercegovina
CEH: Commission for Historical Clarification
DPA: The Dayton Peace Accords
ECMM: European Union Monitoring Mission
HOS: The Croatian Defence Force (right-wing militia)
HV: Croatian Army
HVO: Croatian Defence Council (in Bosnia)
HRW: Human Rights Watch
JNA: Yugoslav National Army
ICG: International Crisis Group
IDP: Internally Displaced Persons
ICTR: International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
ICTY: International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia
IFOR: US-led NATO peace Implementation Force
IWPR: Institute for War and Peace Reporting
NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO: Non-governmental Organisations
OHR: Office of the High Representative (of the United Nations Security Council)
OSP: Owen-Stoltenberg peace plan
OSCE: The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RDC: Research and Documentation Centre
RS: Republika Srpska
SFOR: NATO-led Stabilisation Force
SoE: The Soul of Europe
VRS: The Bosnian Serb Army
VOPP: Vance-Owen Peace Plan
UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency
UNPROFOR: UN Protection Force
TO: Territorial Defence

Introduction

This thesis is essentially the story of a group of people - from my own home region, but most of whom I did not know upon starting on my research journey - who have been individually and collectively picking up the pieces of their lives after the trauma of ethnic cleansing. I have followed their progress over a period of eight years as they attempted to return to the town of Kozarac, which had been comprehensively destroyed, and recreate their community in the middle of an aggressively nationalistic new political entity that is largely hostile to their continued presence. It is their story, not mine, and as an anthropologist I have tried to get out of the way and let them tell it, with all its subjectivity, confusion and variety of perspective (Madden, 2010, Das, 1987). As somebody who shared their experience, I have had unique access, although I have also had to earn their trust, and it is precisely this embedded, empathetic approach that much of the existing work on post-conflict recovery, return and redevelopment sometimes misses. It is important to consider, I think, how one can access a deeper understanding of communal activities and social relations both within and outside overtly political notions of victimhood and belonging. I believe there is a lot to learn about how people cope with, respond and ultimately take control of such a situation, and I hope this small contribution is useful to those who face such a challenge in the future.

Notes on Methodology

In researching this thesis, my primary research methods were participant observation and the use of new communication technologies as an extension of qualitative research technique (Clarke, 2000, Miller, 2000). My aim was to use a combination of methods to pursue a more comprehensive approach to looking at notions of home and community as they are being re-made. Whilst I believe that long-term fieldwork is essential to understand the aims and needs of those who constitute such a community, modern methodological tools can have a significant impact on testing one's field experience and data. My experience suggests to me that combined field practice is crucial in post-conflict sites of research, as social structures and support networks are permanently in a state of flux. Since 2003, I have spent most of my summers in Kozarac

gathering data for my studies, and I have tracked the actions of the returnee community since 1995¹.

Participant observation entails a contradiction in itself as participation and observing are two opposing terms (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002, Denzin 1997). Can and should one participate within the realms of survivors and war victims whilst staying emotionally detached? Perhaps that is possible, but in my case it was not. My own family background and loss meant that I was involved in the social web of connections and ways of being that can only be understood in silence, rather than objectively and impartially analysed through language. Participant observation as “a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people” (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002: 1) is an insightful way of accessing many levels of human experience, loss, desire and other dimensions of human life. However, there were times when I felt it was necessary but not sufficient, as the bond we think we form with people is not always as authentic as we believe (Beatty, 2010). We all play social roles, and a degree of insincere behaviour is to be expected when one sets out to achieve certain goals. And when a researcher states them explicitly, as we are taught to do, in the environment I work in, people do not assume that you are there to help them, especially if you are a native. A degree of suspicion that you are building your career or being paid to explore their world was a natural response in most people I encountered. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, a number of camp survivors have been speaking in their countries of exile about their suffering, and a decade later some of these people are perceived as “celebrities,” who only think of themselves. Second, the journalists’ and researchers’ interest in very personal stories is largely seen as unproductive, and at times dangerous (Ross, 2003: 329)². To be part of this story, I had to prove myself in a way that foreign scholars do not, as there were expectations of me that were sometimes implicit and sometimes explicitly stated.

¹ In the Summer of 1995, I spent time with an Evening Standard journalist in Central Bosnia, visiting displaced persons from Kozarac, and their Brigade, which was then conquering Mount Vlasic on their way home. Their journey home formed the basis of my master thesis in history, *Going Home*, 2003.

² Fiona Ross and Christopher Colvin have examined various victim groups in South Africa post-TRC, noticing the overwhelming feeling of being used and abandoned by scholars, journalists, and the state's delays in applying reparation measures only exacerbated the sense of frustration.

When I was asked to perform the role of translator during local peoples' encounters with foreign visitors, journalists, peace builders and so on, or asked to accompany them as a guide through the fields of a scarred physical landscape (Bender 2001, Tilly 1997)) to ensure they understood the meanings and contestation embodied in sites of memory, these tasks were seen as a privileged responsibility rather than an obligation (Robinson, 2005). However, the participatory component of the field research has many sides to it. Depending on a particular context, one might feel engaged or expected to actively participate, whilst at other times, just passively to observe. There are times when, overwhelmed by the emotionality of narratives of violence, I felt a need to escape it altogether. Similarly, on several occasions, I might be passively observing a meeting between a foreign delegation from Sarajevo and the local associations, discussing the life of a returnee, discrimination and their sense of the victimhood, which gave me an inside view of the confusion and mis-aligned expectations that such encounters involve for the returnees. Often, no-one had a clear idea what the visits were about, and one could observe the impatience of the foreign guests whilst listening to long monologues about life in Kozarac. At times, I shared their feelings, but in contrast to them, I also knew these individuals, which meant that my frustrations were centred on particular informants (Dawes, 2007, Pickering, 2001). With time, I learned to cope and manage certain impressions that the intersubjective nature of the field elicited (Obeyesekere 1990). As I was a situated observer (Panourgia, 2002), and in a place that is still defining itself socially and politically, I found that I had to abandon the ideas and plans of whom and when to meet, and in what social activities to engage, as many of them were emergent, informal and often did not happen as suggested by the participants. Rather I followed the daily social activities and rituals of the community, which involved a lot of hanging out and chatting. And a lot of coffee.

The nature of the community, its history of recent displacement and media coverage during and after the war, all influenced my decision not to conduct any formal interviews during the fieldwork. Avoiding interviews placed constraints on my research, such as lacking basic information about an individual's background in some cases, but it also avoided a form of communication that was manipulated on both sides to produce a pre-determined outcome. The inhabitants of Kozarac and local associations are frequently approached by foreign and national media, and in the last couple of years,

with a growing foreign scholarly interest in memory practices, the voluntary offering of personal testimony has become routine. In many ways, being native, I was largely spared this experience on the implicit assumption that “I already know it” (Lambek, 1997). However, in order to test my knowledge and assumptions regarding public narratives, I was able to position myself as a translator or a passive observer when an interview was being conducted. I observed how two main practices of eliciting personal information of suffering are conducted by journalists and researchers. Television crews would generally push for a detailed story of a survivor’s experience, to the extent that interviews sometimes appeared more as interrogations. A more subtle elicitation was employed by scholars, in meetings with the locals in cafes and in generally using more subtle, but sometimes equally transparent interview techniques.

My own experience was something of an invisible researcher. As a Portuguese colleague working in Bosnia remarked: “as a researcher you are invisible”. There is a belief that if you are not a journalist or from a media outlet, regardless of how many times you explain your interest, all that is left is your foreign roots that define you. With no such background, I was entirely invisible most of the time. The only time I was made visible as a researcher rather than a native just hanging around, was in two instances: in meetings with local intellectuals, or if approached by a Serb. As non-Serb intellectuals and professionals were a targeted social group during the ethnic cleansing (Gratz, 2007), their legacy is deeply felt by community members’ sense of what was described to me as a “headless existence.” In Bosnian culture, and particularly in small communities, higher education is seen as a prestigious achievement and something that defines you in relation to laymen.

Most of my interactions were with ordinary people, and elderly groups in particular. Staying with lonely women, and listening to their “life stories” that often came spontaneously, late at night, and carried on well into the early mornings, I felt obliged to listen. Although this developed a deeper rapport between us, it also meant that their perception and expectation of me would eventually lead them to disappointment. I recall meeting a Serb inhabitant of Kozarac, whom I often visited at her home, but this time I saw her at a conference in the Peace House. When she approached and embraced me,

several women looked at me showing clear disapproval. They never spoke to me about it, but I detected a certain wall being built between us.

In the emotional practice of fieldwork within post-violence community, reflexivity on the part of a researcher cannot be underestimated. Despite my apparent invisibility, there were times when I was aware to have influenced or directed certain themes of conversation among women in the Peace Centre, for example. Or in the case of a rape victim, who once I met her, took me to her home and spoke all night about her ordeal in a very raw manner. These stories are permeated with powerful emotions and have an immediate effect on the listener and the narrator alike. Also, there was an element of “ethnographic seduction” that I experienced (Robben, 1995). In other words, some stories were told to me as a way of leading me to believe a particular person’s experience was perceived as worthy of recording. In these cases, it was not about my “significance,” but rather about competition between local women over who had the right to narrate the collective representation through their personal recall of the past (Winter, 2006). Others, like my persuasive informant, used rhetorical arguments and facts to pique my research interest. He perceived my work focused too much on “the success of return,” whilst the facts such as the missing, the denial, the random attacks on religious buildings and asymmetric power relations illustrated a different, more depressing picture of the present.

Regular trips home to my family in London gave me space to reflect, and I am glad I did not stay for a single long period instead. Also, through Kozarac’s lively online community, where most people I met continue discussions pertaining to communal problems and legacies of the recent war, I found a testing ground for my field observations. In fact, online debates seemed in some ways more authentic, as members did not feel a need to employ social manners in the same way they are regulated in a physical place (Bernal, 2005). Hence, men who might be drinking coffee together in the mornings at the cafes, would be open about their disagreement over an issue when discussing online. This was partly due to a Bosnian tradition of communication where any direct disagreement can be perceived as hostility as is to be avoided (Lovrenovic, 2010). Online, one felt free to express an opinion and not suffer immediate (emotional) reactions, which is a very under-appreciated aspect of social networking among

vulnerable communities. Most key informants have stayed in ongoing communication with me, and in many ways continued to give me their analysis and impressions on the happenings in town and among its dispersed communities in exile. The disadvantage of this aspect of my methodology was that I was often interrupted in London, during the writing of this thesis, by numerous informants eager to give me “updates,” but this also gave me a way of showing that I have not “moved on” and forgotten them after my fieldwork was over.

Resilience in War Trauma Survivors: A word on theoretical considerations

All memory whether "individual", "collective", or "historical" is memory for something and this political (in a broad sense) purpose cannot be ignored. (Geary, P.L. 1994:12).

In response lies possibility of healing (Last, M. 2005)

Trauma and resilience are two notions that permeate this study. How victims remember, and more importantly, how they respond to violence have been extensively investigated by scholars throughout the Twentieth Century. Specifically in relation to war victims, it is clear that the context and social or cultural dimension of trauma are crucial in our understanding of the politics of victimhood and social recovery. Understanding the context - the particular violent events that led to trauma and its prolongation (social trauma) - necessitates a shift from a purely victim-centric examination of pathologies to consider also the victim's need for sociopolitical transformation of the world that created their victim identity in the first place. For example, the nature of the polity in which they find themselves after violence is of crucial importance in determining how they are able to deal with past injustice and create a better future. As Harrison puts it, the establishment of peace requires concerted purpose and intentionality (p.4). Through conflict, new polities are constructed. In transitional societies, the political and social context in which the victims reconstruct their personal and social world, whether their grievances are addressed or ignored, are indicators of what kinds of collective and personal rituals of remembering will evolve.

The Twentieth Century witnessed several genocides and mass traumatic events that stimulated scholarship in this area, most notably with the emergence of Holocaust studies, and scholars began to focus on the historical, political and social antecedents of genocide as a route to prevention. Staub's notion of the creation of "ideologies of antagonism" has been explored in the use of mass media, images, radio shows and nationalist narratives that hark back to the historical suffering of a group in order to appeal to hatred, fear and an urge to take pre-emptive violent action (cf Staub. (1989) E, Fein. H. 1999). Many scholars have looked at the way ethnic or nationalist animosities are constructed, noticing the significance of dehumanising the other prior to committing mass violence. Meanwhile, anthropological work on memory has tended to explore the myriad forms of collective, familial and personal rituals after the event, to understand how excessive losses have been transmitted, transformed and created new social and personal relatedness, and helped us to understand how people cope with too little or too much memory (Carsten, 2007, Lambek, Das, 2001, Scheper-Hughes, 2005).

My work is part of this tradition, and attempts to show how personal and communal expulsion, dislocation and excessive loss as a result of war affect and re-shape communal belonging and identity. My empirical evidence shows loss and effacement of communal and familial ties are an obvious and dominant source of grievances, but also motivational vehicles for action. However, the nature of war as the primary context means that our historical and political bias has a significant impact on the way we treat and understand victims. Ironically, by focusing on the victimhood entailed in trauma emanating from violence, and through the application of the passive label 'traumatised' (Fassin, 2009), we run the risk of ignoring the victim as a social agent, which can have a crippling effect on the victim's perception of themselves in the long term. In what follows, then, I shall look briefly at an historical evaluation of memory and trauma studies, and review some of the empirical work on the effects of narratives and testimonies on the victims; finally, I shall note several works on resilience that claim most survivors of trauma do not actually exhibit traumatic syndromes.

Social memory and significance of trauma

Writing between the Two World Wars, the psychologist Bartlett (1932) looked at the means by which people store, transform and retrieve meaningful stories, events and images. Unlike German psychologist, Ebbinghaus (1885), who at the turn of the Twentieth Century inaugurated the psychology study of memory by examining the inscription of nonsense syllables and how they are retrieved, Bartlett regarded such tests as artificial, as they were devoid of social frame of reference. He was concerned with how memory operated in everyday life. Using Native American folk tales on his English participants unfamiliar with the stories, he recognised how each reproduction of the story would show new snippets that were essentially familiar to his participants rather than being an authentic reproduction of the story. He called this an "effort after meaning", referring to the human tendency to interpret or perceive something through the filter of their background or past experiences.

The contemporary interest in the sociology of collective memory dates to Halbwachs (1992) work on *Collective Memory*, in which he claims that individual remembering always occurs within a social context; human recollection is influenced by factors such as family, culture, education and so on. A medieval historian, Geary (1994), has pointed out that although Halbwachs never claimed that there is a "social mind", many scholars have debated the putative dichotomy between individual and collective memory, whilst others have examined the notions of historical and collective processes of memory formation (cf. Nora, Ricoeur). In his wonderful book describing oral and textual processes of recollection among ordinary people, Geary notes that individual and collective memory have always been complementary rather than divided. He provides the example of how a hagiographer writing his book, *Miracula S. Maximing*, circulated a draft among older monks who reminded him of certain omissions, which he took on board whilst revising his book (Geary, 1994:11). In his understanding of the practices of memory in medieval theology and in life generally, he points out that *memoria*, which meant memory including objects and actions by which memory is preserved, such as funerary rites and the rituals pertaining to the dead, not only commemorated the departed but made them present through the manipulation of words (names) and objects (Ibid, 18). He claimed that the medieval interest in memory practices had much to do

with the need to recover a real past, in contrast to modern studies on memory that focus on "the creation of the remember".

Much literature on memory and trauma are not only metaphorical and overtly concerned with the experiential dimension of memory that often deals with de-contextualised representations of the past (White, 2006, Kansteiner, 2002:179), but also overwhelmingly concerned with an interpretative remembering. The late Twentieth Century focus on victimhood and the "universalisation of trauma" was in part the result of scholarly, literary and public interest in the victim's experience. Dealing with the past has become our preoccupation, the politics of reparation, justice and reconciliation debates encapsulated in the new field of Transitional Justice (Torpey, 2006); a field that claims an holistic approach to social reconstruction, encompassing traditional retributive and restorative practices. And yet, evidence of a real transformation in the experience of communal and social life among perpetrators and victims after violence is still sparse. Some scholars have claimed that this is the result of the "top-down" approach of the field that often fails to involve ordinary members of communities, and have argued for a better understanding of local dynamics between the victim and perpetrator groups, and specifically a deeper understanding of the needs of the victim group.

In parallel to the research on collective or social representations of memory, another key influence on the field was the soldiers' experience of World War One. On the battlegrounds of Europe, many suffered psychological disturbances, and these were diagnosed as shell shock, by which the sufferers describe various physical and psychological symptoms such as nightmares and anxiety. In his book on the historical development of trauma, Fassin (2009) writes how these symptoms were regarded by military psychiatrists to be a farce, indicating a weak soldier who was avoiding his duties. In short, trauma was regarded with suspicion. Examining various historical periods of human suffering in wars and significant historical epochs, many scholars have claimed that it would later be the Vietnam War that paved the way to our contemporary understanding of trauma, and more importantly, the effects of traumatic events on the victim. The 1960's, then, which also saw the womens' emancipation

movement that unleashed suppressed memories of sexual abuse, and also the ultimate recognition of the Holocaust, was a time in which victimhood took centre stage.

The unleashing of suppressed or repressed abuse into the public domain was not only about healing but also recognition, reckoning and in some cases retribution. Through the recognition of human suffering on a massive scale, affected social groups were perceived as being consumed by their experiences. A culture of trauma emerged in which members of the collective feel that they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group, creating “a narrative about a horrible destructive social process and a demand for emotional, institutional and symbolic reparation and reconstruction” (Jeffrey, A. 2004:11). For sociologist Kai Erikson (1994), the effacement of communal life is symptomatic of “traumatised communities” suggesting that trauma can create community. Similar to the processes of memory, trauma as an internal turmoil of human mind moved from psychological assumptions to sociological processes. Anti-war sentiment in the US pertaining to the Vietnam debacle meant that soldiers returning home were not perceived as heroes. As Edkins (2003) suggest in her book *Trauma and the Memory of Politic*, whether the focus on the soldiers returning home and their well being was a result of the real interest in their suffering and recovery or whether they were a scapegoat to the political position is irrelevant. The invention of post traumatic stress disorder was a legacy of the Vietnam War, and as Derek Summerfield (2002) argued, it was situated within US strategies dealing with a nationally important event. But arguably, this was later globally applied in all kinds of mental health issues and social recovery, and PTSD diagnoses have often meant that victims are examined entirely devoid of the context in which their trauma was generated and there has been great emphasis placed on testimony and narrative sharing as a form of healing on their own.

In contrast, other writers have critically explored how the victims' traumatic experiences have been communicated in the public domain. They have looked, for example, at how narratives as a form of memory practice, and testimonies given in various truth commissions and judicial processes, have been culturally codified and their trauma appropriated by others. For example, in the South African Truth and Reconciliation processes, the commission often stressed publicly the healing power of storytelling

exemplified as giving a voice to the voiceless (Ross, 2003). In the setting up of the international court in the Hague (ICTY) in 1993 for the crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia, Orentlicher points that reconciliation was not referred to in the establishment of the court nor included in the goals of the Tribunal, and yet many assumed the goal of reconciliation existed, reflected in the ICTY judgments and reports. She notes that ICTY trial chambers have sometimes cited reconciliation as a consideration in sentencing defendants who confess to their crimes (Orentlicher, 2010: 39). In a similar vein, many viewed Rwanda's traditional *gacaca* - communal settings in which perpetrators and victims disclosed their past experiences - as processes of social and individual recovery.

How these varying systems of justice and peacemaking affect the survivors, their communities and their relations to the perpetrator's group is still the subject of relatively few longitudinal studies, and yet we continue to believe in their healing powers in the context of social reconstruction. The empirical evidence suggests the work of truth commissions have not only standardised the story of traumatic experiences, but also contributed to the survivors' sense of not being in control of their representation and ultimately their selves. The appropriation and consumption of testimonies has had a negative effect on the victims within the context in which their shattered world was being rebuilt. We know now that most victims tell their stories in order to ignite some social or political reaction, or in a search to discover some facts about their past and those who have been killed or are still missing. The latter, the need to find and bury the dead, is not about 'closure' but rather a universal human need to perform religious, personal or communal funeral rituals - in short, to say goodbye to loved ones.

Kali Tal's book, *Worlds of Hurt*, critically examines the literature on trauma, including the Vietnam War, the Holocaust and sexual abuse. She claims that there are three ways of social coping with the accounts of survivors: mythologisation, medication and disappearance. Mythologisation refers to creating a story from the traumatic event that is controlled and constrained for public consumption. Medicalisation implies treating the survivor's experience as an illness that needs to be healed, such as PTSD. Disappearance refers to the refusal to admit that the particular kind of trauma exists, which undermines the victim's credibility (Tal, 1996:6). What is common to all these

processes of "cultural codification of trauma", then, is the victim-centric strategies that decontextualise the experiences and render them apolitical. And yet, as some studies show, for the victim to act in any meaningful way, a certain sense of responsibility is felt, whether fidelity to the dead (Booth, 2006), or a desire for recognition, acknowledgment and social justice (Ross 2003, Stover 2002, Clark, 2010). Tal discusses the influence and legacy of the Holocaust survivor on the interpretation of the statements of survivors of other traumas (Tal, 1996:24) and gives an overview from a psychoanalytical and literary writers' point of view in relation to the survivor. As in her article on the Language of pain, she articulates that the traumatic experience can never be communicated by secondhand narrators, if that is its main purpose. The representation of the Holocaust, and who has the right to define and interpret it, was initially debated by survivor scholars such as Bettelheim, but eventually it spread into literary strategies. Her work looks closely at the ways in which four authors approached the victims' testimonies: Young, Langer, Felman and Laub, claiming that the urge for interpretive remembering - be it in the text, video testimonies or psychoanalyst's "bearing witness" - has not only appropriated the survivors' experiences but also abjected them.

South African anthropologist, Ross, in her work on the effects of testimonies given to the Truth Commission, raises similar issues through her empirical study of women's perceptions of the significance of testimonies. She draws from M. Jackson's (2002) notion of stories as a dialogical construction in which the teller narrates the self in life events for an audience larger than the self, referring to Wilson's (2001) claims that testimonials of gross violation of human rights in the case of South Africa were anticipated as a mechanism for forging national unity premised on a shared knowledge of suffering in the past. The Commission offered a new structure of narrating violence open to a broad public to hear. The author claims that eventually hearing stories of violence became formulaic, as the commissioners often constrained and limited the story to what was perceived to be relevant and worthy of hearing. She describes a sense among the women that they had no control over their testimonies and their interpretation as the testimonials were broadcasted and interpreted by the influx of journalists and researchers. Ross gives an example in which testifiers felt that they may have said more than they wanted to, whilst those who discovered their testimonies in the book, such as eminent journalist and writer, Krog, felt their experiences had been

translated to hers, and took unauthorised ownership of the stories. The commodification and appropriation of such stories is further illustrated by Colvin (2002), who explores the effects of scholarly and journalistic interest in the stories, which has made some interviewers consider charging money as a way to take charge of one's story, and seems to have had negative personal and political consequences after testifying.

In contrast, Phil Clark (2010: 263) argues that the experience of the victims of Rwandan genocide within the traditional communal hearing of *gacaca* has allowed them not only to tell their stories, but through empathetic listeners (survivors), they have also felt reintegrated in the community. In doing so, healing as belonging occurs where an individual's story is acknowledged by the community. However, he recognises that one of the main reasons why individuals participate in *gacaca* is the desire to find out what happened to their loved ones, whilst many perpetrators are unwilling to participate. In describing how women from Nyarufonzo district in Kigali Ville Province brought pictures of their dead to *gacaca* meetings, he notes a communal sense of mourning through embraces and non verbal action (Ibid:265). When he tried to ask them why they brought the photos, they were reluctant to speak. He rightfully noticed that rituals concerning the dead, for most survivors and families, are felt as intimate experiences within the community, and as *gacaca* is embodied in communal practices, it can also act as a memorial site. Others, such as psychologist Brouneus (2008), claimed that it may only serve to re-traumatise the victims, as the public hearing in which the offender, his family and friends, several judges with no psychological training are part of the audience. Clark claims that one of most important elements of the *gacaca* is its acknowledgement of the past, rather than knowledge of the historical account demonstrated in its setting as a public dialogue in which suspects and victims with all the complexities, reasons for participating and pain of telling (Clark, 2010: 272-273).

Bar-On's (2007) work with Jewish descendants of Holocaust victims and German descendants of Nazis, in a group called To Reflect and Trust (TRT), is an insightful example of "working through" the legacies of mass crimes. He argues that the establishment of the Hague Tribunal and the Rwandan court for genocide has shown the limitations of legal processes on social recovery. He points out that a political solution to the conflict does not guarantee that the conflict is solved within the social and

psychological realm, and this is where reconciliation practices come into play. However, he asserts that reintegration of former enemies should not be imposed, only supported. His work with the TRT group over thirteen years shows that any communal restoration has to be evaluated within the specific context of the social actors involved - in other words: empirically tested. As his participants did not believe in the traditional, religious connotation of reconciliation and argued that they had no right to forgive on behalf of their parents, they decided to focus on dialogue and 'working through' (2007: 68-89). They identified five stages of working through: one's need to know what happened to one's family, the integration of such knowledge into a wider understanding or meaning making (religious, social or a combination), and after the knowledge is framed, there is a stage when specific emotions arise towards the individuals involved. The final two phases he terms 'a phase of splitting,' whereby strong positive or negative emotions develop towards that person, and eventually become independent from the person in question. In a similar way, Maoz (2001), who works on the psychology of the media in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and mechanisms for resolving it, has claimed that intergroup dialogue is necessary for breaking the psycho-cognitive barriers within the context of intractable conflict. Both authors note that through interpersonal dialogue and communication, interpersonal trust can potentially become inter-communal (Albeck, Adwan & Bar-On, 2002). However, Maoz (2011) emphasises that any story-telling has to be accompanied by deeds, such as the punishment of perpetrators, taking care of the needs of the victims, or economic and educational initiatives that might challenge the status quo. In addition, any dialogue needs to be accompanied with a reflectivity understood as an ability for an inner dialogue (Bar-On, 1999). Bar-On argued that conflict creates zones of silencing in a society, and only if some level of reflectivity and dialogue is established that can challenge the collective silencing, is it possible for psychosocial processes to succeed.

Resilience: from victims to agents

Recent studies in human resilience in times of adversity have argued that only small numbers of a given population experience long-term trauma. Most people do not exhibit long-term post-traumatic syndrome after the event, and much of their so-called

negative emotions expressed in the aftermath are simply an understandable human reaction to injustice and suffering.

Bonanno (2004) has claimed that resilience in the face of loss and traumatic events is not pathological state, and that individuals respond and pursue multiple pathways to resilience, which suggests future work on resilience needs to identify a wider range of outcomes as people suffer and recover. Arguing that much of theoretical work on trauma has been derived from individuals who have experienced significant psychological problems and sought treatment, rather than examining a larger group that displays less trauma, he distinguishes between resilience and recovery, arguing that many theorists of trauma seem to be unaware of the difference between the two, believing instead that counselling is needed in all cases. In his view, resilience reflects the ability to maintain a stable equilibrium of psychological and physical health, whilst recovery connotes a trajectory in which normal functioning temporarily gives way to psychological symptoms of PTSD (2004: 20).

Theories of bereavement originating from Freud stress that every individual needs to work through negative thoughts, memories and emotions pertaining to the experience of loss. In his attachment theories, Bowlby (1980) argues that the absence of distress and depressive behaviour after the death of a relative is a pathological symptom of denial or avoidance of the emotional realities of loss. Neimeyer also speaks of complicated grief, where one is unable to mourn the dead, and experiences persistent symptoms of separation distress, such as excessive loneliness, as well as other symptoms of traumatic distress (2002:241). Like Bonanno, he notes that most people recover, or show resilience, through integrating their loss within narrative accounts or communal rituals. In a study of bereaved individuals in the USA and Bosnian civilians living in Sarajevo, the authors argue that personal traits such as unrealistic and overly positive biases in favour of the self, such as the trend for self-enhancement, has, in this particular case, promoted well being (Bonanno, Field, Kovacevic and Katman 2002:25).

Community psychologists have argued that there is a need to develop an ecological approach to trauma, to “augment research on the psychopathology of trauma with investigation into development and contextual mediators of resilient response” (Harvey,

2007). For example, Mary Harvey has spent over twenty years connected with the Victims of Violence Program (VOV) in Massachusetts, an adult outpatient trauma clinic in a multi-site urban health system that attends to a diverse population containing many economically disenfranchised citizens, such as growing communities of immigrants and political refugees from Africa, Asia and Haiti. Drawing on this experience, she claims that intervention in a trauma survivors's mental health ought to have the goal of fostering resilience in the individual and their community. Apart from long term clinical care, she proposes, more attention needs to be given to peoples' lives in context and supporting the survivor to develop relationships with others. Referring to the research on war refugees done by Peddle, she points out that many survivors exhibit positive adjustment in their everyday conduct of life, whilst showing signs of depressions or stress in others. The experience of community psychologist, then, speaks to the importance of environmental interventions to foster wellness and enhance resilience among trauma survivors (Harvey, 2007:16), in contrast to person-centered analysis, which has sometimes neglected environmental variables (Caplan&Nelson in Harvey, 2007).

The power of social context, of communal attachment in the development of personhood and human well being, has been addressed only relatively recently by scholars working in this area. However, the prevailing view of resilience continues to be influenced by Western values of individual achievement, despite the fact that it may not resonate across cultures where resilience might mean something entirely different, and may be embodied within communal practices and a sense of belonging. My own empirical evidence also suggests that the person and their environment, understood as a social, familial and political context, cannot be separated. Interactions based on this observation are not only crucial for developing individual resilience, but also influence the wider community. Promoting competence, agency and empowerment are crucial for long term recovery and the enhancement of factors that contribute to resilience, and may be more successful than individual therapy based on Western notions of psychoanalysis and closure.

The effect of loss of home through war displacement or natural disaster has been documented as leaving many people 'adrift' (Erikson, 1998), as the social fabric of the

locality is often completely destroyed. Ethnographic studies such as the work of Fullilove (1996) in the Harlem area of New York, where one third of homes over thirty years have been destroyed, claims that former inhabitants continue to mourn the loss of their neighbourhood, which affected their individual lives but also undermined community structures (p63), noting how spatial changes have transformed the way Harlem residents perceive the place as no longer being 'their' Harlem any longer. She argues that "disruption to both lines of attachment - person and place" may be far more damaging to physical and mental health (p63) than the direct experience of displacement. Recent anthropological studies have explored the landscape of devastation, or what Das calls societal spaces marked by brutal violence. A number of scholars (Bear, 2007, Kwon, 2008) have written on apparitions and the appearance of ghosts of the dead. Like rituals and story telling, these symbolic phenomena often show the resistance of the survivors in conforming to official narratives or memory politics. Kwon's work in Vietnam portrays how rural communities of Vietnam are often informed by ghosts, who perform various practical tasks that reflect their sense of social marginalisation, through religious practice. Many believe that these ghosts live in the places of crimes and are often portrayed as grievous. He describes members of families who are visited by dead relatives in their dreams and persuaded to travel to their home village and pay for their tombstone or perform funeral rites. Kwon claims that postwar Vietnam's focus on celebrating war heroes and providing funerals for soldiers and the party activists have only served to exacerbate the sense of civilian loss, and the loss of familial ties have not been fully acknowledged. His case study in Mai Lay shows how the cemetery in the village was used for a burial site of war heroes and soldiers whilst women, children and other civilians were moved outside the village into an unmarked grave. Only in the 1990s, during political liberation and economical recovery, was it possible for the villagers to properly rebury their relatives. According to Kwon, the appearance of ghosts as wandering souls that amass social action illustrates the pressing moral and political issues of contemporary society have not been dealt with, but also creates "the possibility to structure the patterns of social life." (2008: 24)

In order to truly understand the behaviour, motivations, fears and problems of a vulnerable group in a transitional post-violence society, we need to dig a lot deeper than the theoretical level, and we should be aware of the limitations of our intellectual

frameworks. The way people relate to the dead, for example, as illustrated by the example of ghosts in Vietnam, can be understood through observation as an adaptation to unusual circumstances, whilst from a conventional psychoanalytical perspective it might appear symptomatic of pathology. Most of the existing literature on post-violent societies, return of refugees and transitional justice is very much located within Twentieth Century frames of reference that find it hard to escape the gravitational pull of reductive psychoanalysis or generalised politics and anthropology. Too much analysis is either too focused on the individual divorced from their social context, or too broad-brush in the way it looks at groups and communities or concepts such as social memory. Scholars such as Bar-On, and community psychologists such as Harvey, were the exceptions, not the rule, when it came to understanding trauma; but they too were concerned with intervention rather than just understanding. In the Twenty-First Century, I hope we can build a far richer picture of people and communities, and the complexity of their differences and inter-relationships, before designing any interventions, however well-intentioned, to help them cope with trauma and rebuild their communities. This means leaving behind quasi-religious approaches to reconciliation for its own sake, which often result in theatrical externally imposed attempts at peace building, and focus instead on supporting the actors themselves in rediscovering a sense of agency and empowerment, and their own efforts to rebuild their relations with each other and with perpetrator groups, in cases such as this one in Bosnia. Rather than seek a single theoretical structure, as has been the case in debates about individual versus collective memory, for example, we should start from ethnography and apply a variety of theoretical tools to help us understand what we observe. In an age when it is possible to sequence the human genome on a desktop device that costs a thousand pounds, or identify the dead from fragments on DNA, I believe we can do a much better job of understanding the complexity and individual fingerprint of peoples experiences of trauma, dislocation, return and community rebuilding, and as a result do a better job of supporting peoples' own efforts to recover or rebuild.

How does a community that suffered ethnic cleansing and expulsion remake itself in a situation of contested return?

I began my research with a few questions in mind:

- a) How do memories of violence become a driving force for return?
- b) How does a post-violence community resume its everyday life, and to what extent is a return to 'everydayness' possible in an environment in which returnees are unwelcome?
- c) How do returnees negotiate their past memories of home in a landscape drastically altered by the physical destruction of property and cultural objects, and in what ways do they seek to create a new landscape that embodies traces of their experience of war and exile?
- d) What kind of community is re-made under these circumstances, and how does it differ from its pre-war existence?
- e) How does the landscape of memory shape identity, especially in places so comprehensively destroyed? What is the role of memorialisation and sites of memory such as mass grave sites, former camps and massacre locations?

Inferred from my empirical evidence, these questions persist and are relevant in the growing field of Transitional Justice, which seeks an holistic approach to a societal inability to deal with past crimes and move on (Moon, 2006). The growing debate on how post-conflict societies recover from intimate violence acknowledges the need for more research at the local communal level (Mannergren-Selimovic, 2010) as, for example, in Bosnia the Hague Tribunal has not had the desired effect in terms of having significant positive effects on the repair of community trust and ultimately reconciliation (Stover&Weinstein, 2004). In fact, like much of international intervention in Bosnia, it has entrenched or sustained division resulting from the conflict (Chandler, 2000. Wilson, 2003, Jansen, 2011). Despite the impressive archival records which clearly show that ethno-nationalism (Connor,1994, Lovrenovic, 2010) and its mechanisms of violence have focused on very local communal levels, this has not resulted in policies or longitudinal empirical research at that communal level.³

3 For example, The Outreach Programme was created in 1999 "with the purpose of improving the understanding of the work of the Tribunal and its relevance in the territory of the former Yugoslavia". <http://www.icty.org/sid/10648>

The Prijedor region, like Srebrenica and Sarajevo, came to symbolise some of the worst crimes of the Bosnian war, but it is also a rare example of the reversal of ethnic cleansing pursued almost entirely on a local level, with little political support from national or international authorities (Lippman, 2007, 1999, Vandiver, 2001, Mulic-Basatlja, 2001). As such, it also exemplifies a societal inability or reluctance to engage with the effects of the war on its people over the long term. At a state level, both the post-Dayton Bosnian government and the UN High Representative that oversees its activities have focused on economic reconstruction and pump-priming as the primary means to smooth over the divisions created by the war, in the belief that this will lead to reconciliation based on mutual economic advantage (Belloni, 2007). And whilst we have seen that International intervention in Bosnia has evolved, as in other countries, from physical rebuilding to peace building initiatives, it has yet to prove itself in practical application, as opposed to discourses and workshops on how to reconcile and build democracy on the local level.

My work is concerned with notions of home after forcible displacement and its recreation; what kind of community emerges? How do individuals' memories impact on the sense of self as both a victim and an agent who is actively engaged in the development of post-war society? Drawing from cognitive psychology, phenomenology, political and social anthropology and material culture, I intend to explore how the human condition demands to be anchored in some way or another, particularly in communities that have survived an attempt to destroy them.

Outline of Chapters

Each chapter tells a different part of the story of the Kozarac community as a textual strategy that illuminates, I hope, how the experience of violence can also bring about human resilience (Torpey, 2006. Bonanno, 2004) and the will to take control of one's situation. As one informant recently remarked: "we cannot deny the overwhelming sense of victimhood that continues to pervade every fibre of our life, but we have another story to tell and that is one of our fight."⁴

4 Fieldnotes May 2011.

The first chapter deals with the formation of the 17th Krajisnik Brigade of the Bosnian Army, consisting of volunteers - both Bosnians from abroad and those who were expelled from the region, who travelled to Central Bosnia and joined up to fight for the right to reclaim their homes. In describing their motivation and human endurance in pursuing this goal, the chapter serves as a background, providing certain themes as leitmotiv that continue throughout the thesis. It shows how civilian (survivors and exiled) became soldiers and then returned to being civilians again at the war's end. But these civilians were changed individuals, through their experience of war, incarceration, bearing witness to the murder of non-Serb intellectuals and the elite; this experience brought a new solidarity and sense of collective purpose to re-gain their homes in Kozarac and the Prijedor region, and rebuild their community. Through discipline, self-reliance and fundraising, a new leadership emerged that was crucial in providing a sense of safety and successful return and re-appropriation of home.

As former soldiers, they were objects of suspicion among the Serb population, but their leadership was regarded as equals in the negotiations with the Serb authority in the early stages of return. In short, the veterans of the 17th brigade became the armature, the dynamo generator of the power that enabled return into Republika Srpska by otherwise powerless, unthreatening people. In order to explain how that new sense of empowerment came into being, I need to describe in some details the processes and the campaign that built it.

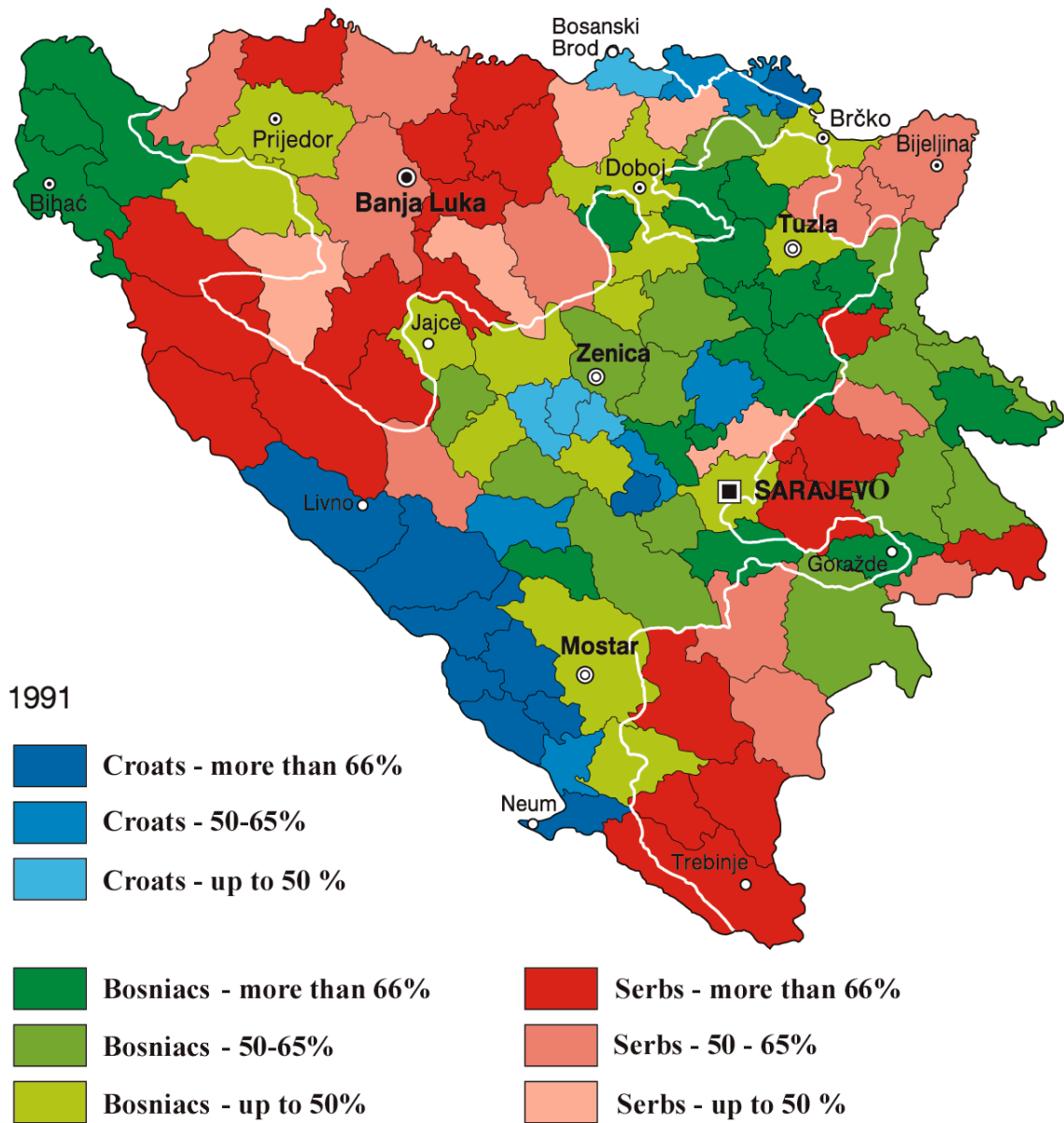
The second chapter examines the specific agents of return - the women - and how they were organised or sustained themselves in the face of not only pain but also opposition and hostility. It deals with return itself after the war ended. It explores the difficulties and setbacks during the negotiation of return, but also creativity of the leadership in dealing with obstacles and communal trauma. Reinforcing communal ties among the displaced and refugees, and a shared sense of working towards the return, women's organisations were key players in this process, and helped dispel the fear associated with going home to a new political entity that strongly discouraged their return. I also explore new ways of supporting sustainable return through the development of online communities.

The third chapter shows the new “battleground” of return - the struggle over graves that symbolise to both Serbs and Bosniaks ownership and belonging; and, it describes the processes of mourning, pain and memory as obvious driving forces for return. This phase created a collective demonstration on the part of the returnees: “we are back, our dead are back and named, and here we are to recognise, every 24th of May their return.” Despite the desire to overcome victimhood and humiliation suffered during the ethnic cleansing, the physical landscape of the area is marked by over fifty mass graves, and the experience of mass killings has had a large impact on communal practices of mourning and memory practices. I examine various ways in which these collective rituals deal with loss and also play a political role in re-establishing the community. I argue that it is the loss that continues to impact people’s life, rather than an overt emphasis on memory as a cause of too much or too little remembering (Maier, 1993, Olick & Caughlin, 2003, Winter, 2006).

The fourth chapter examines the case study of the failed intervention to support the demand of survivors of the Omarska camp to create a memorial on its former site, an iron ore mine now jointly owned by a major multinational company. A project formulated and envisaged as a reconciliation initiative by a foreign NGO, this process not only contributed in creating division among many intergroup relations but also confirmed that the treatment of the victims as powerless needy individuals filled with anger and revenge only leads to reinforcing the pain and the suffering of already marginalised and discriminated community.

This empirical example acts as an opening for my critique of theories of trauma, in my final chapter on reconciliation and healing - a view of victimhood that focuses on individual recovery outside the social realm of human life and the context in which it was produced. I unpack the meaning of the victim in the local understanding of the word and how that is manifested in practice. Does the politics of victimhood practiced by some social actors bring about social recovery and a future-oriented life, or does it disable any future plans of meaningful social action? I juxtapose these public activities with a more intimate communal expression of suffering and modes of being that convey a more positive and recovery-oriented understanding of suffering.

Ethnic composition before the war in BiH (1991)



Pre-war ethnic composition of Bosnia-Herzegovina shows how mixed the country was before ethnic cleansing - overlaid with the post-Dayton inter-entity boundary.

Source: OHR.

Chapter 1: The Army of the Dispossessed

One thing is certain: needlessly spilled blood of Muslims are already beginning to retaliate against us. There is information, the Muslims who were expelled from the Prijedor municipality and those who left and have never done anything against the Republika Srpska, now in Croatia are arming themselves and coming back to fight against us. (Cuskic & Kliko, 2010:21)

In late May 1992, rumours of the ethnic cleansing of non-Serb communities in North-West Bosnia reached diaspora communities and workers in Croatia, Slovenia and Western Europe from the Bosanska Krajina region. Limited communication with those at home in early May and then the sudden cutting off of telephone lines created apprehension and fear among those outside the region. In order to hear any news from home, radio stations⁵ were set up in Slovenia and Croatia which would transmit family concerns regarding their homes and relatives in Bosnia. Bosnian workers in Slovenia even called in a live radio show from Ljubljana, pretended to be Serbs from a village in Prijedor, to ask the Serbian Major, Milovan Milutinovic, about their families and what was going on in the region. They were told that they should not worry about their families as they are safe and that the Army had begun *ciscenje* (cleansing)⁶.

The world changed very quickly for Bosniaks in Prijedor and Kozarac. On the night of April 29th 1992, the Serbian SDS and other nationalist groups had launched a coup in Prijedor that saw them take over all key buildings and functions of the city, including the municipal assembly, and military units set up checkpoints around the town. Shortly afterwards, attacks on non-Serb towns and villages had begun. Wherever civilians attempted to set up barricades to defend their town, such as the village of Hambarine and the town of Kozarac, Serb forces launched full-scale assaults resulting in many deaths. Hambarine was attacked on May 22nd, resulting in a massacre of over 50 Bosniak men who were lined up and shot. Kozarac was attacked on May 24th and over two days, several thousand people were killed before survivors were gathered in the

⁵ For example, there was a radio station at Ljubljana University run by a Bosnian student that became a popular place where people tried to get in touch with their families in Bosnia and hear some news of those that went missing. Later, it would transmit stories of survival, and help those expelled in finding family members that were scattered across the world.

⁶ Fieldnotes, In conversation with a former soldier, Hifo, February, 2008.

stadium and then dispatched to the camps. The entire town was burned and then the remnants of houses were bulldozed to prevent people ever coming back. From late May until August, almost the entire population of the area went through the camp system, and above and beyond the everyday torture and beatings, there were further massacres of whole groups of people from Hambarine, Brdo and other areas inside the camps. As international focus gradually turned to the camps, groups were released towards the end of the summer and made their way to central Bosnia, and many then continued to a life of exile in Croatia or other countries that agreed to take Bosnian refugees (Vulliamy, 1994, Gutman, 1993, Wesselingh & Vaulerin, 2005, Maass, 1997).⁷

As Prijedor is only sixty miles away from the Croatian capital of Zagreb, the news of expulsion of Bosniaks and Croats from the municipality was well known by the end of May when first refugees arrived in Zagreb. Workers would gather at the main Mosque in Zagreb looking for some news about their families. On the walls of the Mosque, notes were left by those who made it to Croatia with messages passed by those left behind⁸. On May 27th, around a thousand people gathered to discuss how they could help their families and their homes (Cuskic&Kliko, 2010:23) . It was decided that they would form a military unit that would join the Bosnian Army (ARBiH) and fight their way home. They stationed themselves in Zagreb's barracks of Borongaj, where the Croatian Army (HV) conducted training. Named the 1st Battalion of ARBiH, their training was financed by donations from wealthy Krajisniks residing in Western Europe⁹. These individuals would become the backbone of a logistics network across Europe established to supporting the Brigade throughout the war.

7 See summary of ICTY, reports on Prijedor: <http://www.icty.org/sid/10169>

8 The contents of these messages were usually to let families abroad know that they are alive but unable to move out from the occupied region, or that they have made it to Central Bosnia but robbed of all their possessions by the Serbs, and are in need of money to make it to Croatia, for example.

9 During the Bosnian War, Croatia was willing to assist and allow food and ammunition supplies to go through Croatian-held territory, and also directly helped the Northern Bihac region by engaging in an airlift of humanitarian and other needs for Bihac's sieged population. Nonetheless, contrary to some foreign and regional authors, this was always a pragmatic decision on the part of the Croatian government and varied according to political circumstances. Similarly, Bosnian refugees were paying high rents, financed by various Arab NGOs, in the capital of Zagreb, whilst Croatian citizens complained of their government being far too hospitable regarding the humanitarian issues caused by the Bosnian conflict.

The Formation of the 17th Brigade

Thus began one of the most extraordinary stories of the Bosnian war - the role of the so-called “Army of the Dispossessed,” which would go on to have a major impact on the latter stages of the conflict, and create the possibility for eventual return by ordinary people from Kozarac and the surrounding areas. In this part of the thesis, I will look at how those abroad at the time of the initial ethnic cleansing reacted to the stories of their families’ expulsion and murder. I will consider how they utilised their experience of loss and dispossession to motivate themselves in their struggle, and how they gave meaning to the war by fighting for return. Those who found themselves in a foreign country, unable to return, often could not grapple with the massive loss, nor adapt to life in exile whilst the war continued, and many of these chose to return and join the Brigade to fight their way home. Equally, for many who had directly experienced the ethnic cleansing and the humiliation that accompanied it, the only action that could assuage their traumatic memories was joining the Brigade, and the group cohesion this gave them was a form of coping, and possibly also healing, in itself. This group combining members of the diaspora and survivors of the ethnic cleansing, would go on to become one of the best and most mobile units of the Bosnian army. Their discipline, military training and success on the battlefield, and the comradeship this engendered, are explored here to show how experiences of expulsion and trauma can drive social transformation and individual recovery¹⁰. When the time of return finally arrived, it was this group that organised it and made it possible.

The Croatian Army’s assistance turned out to be short-lived. Among the volunteers, there was no single person with a military background, which made them entirely dependant on the Croatian officers’ training, which also contained elements of political indoctrination such as the assertion that Bosnian Muslims are actually nothing more than Croats of the Muslim faith, and they were given uniforms that combined the religious symbols of the Catholic and Muslim Rosaries (Cuskic & Kliko, 2010). A few weeks into the training, restless volunteers were eager to embark on their anticipated journey to combat. The Croatian Army took them to Nova Gradiska, a Croatian town

¹⁰ During the war, many stories in the army’s newspaper of Sloboda (Freedom) describe the stories of refugees who arrived from Western countries and joined the brigade. One sixty-four year old, for example, spoke of feeling content for the first time since expulsion, as he felt useful on the frontline knowing that they are fighting for return.

bordering Northern Bosnia, and Several soldiers attempted to swim across Bosnian river Una with a plan to attack the Bosnian Serb Army from the direction of Mount Kozara; but it became clear that the Bosnian Serb Army (VRS) was guarding all entry points to this area of Bosnia. The presence of such a large number of VRS soldiers was partly due to their ongoing search for any non Serb citizens of Kozarac and surrounding areas that might have tried to cross into Croatia via Mount Kozara.¹¹ It gradually became clear to the volunteers that they were taken to this region of Croatia to safeguard the Croatian border rather than engage the Serb forces inside Bosnia, and the ensuing argument resulted in the volunteer unit leaving the Croatian Army early the next morning and breaking into the warehouse where their weapons were stored. Their return to Zagreb meant that they could no longer stay at the Borongaj barracks, so they moved to the Velesajam¹² (a kind of exhibition zone). The following day, Croatian police confiscated their weapons. Under constant stress of being caught and forcibly mobilised into Croatian army units or the Bosnian-Croat HVO, they left for Central Bosnia in a convoy of several buses and private vehicles containing over six hundred people.

In Rijeka, on the Croatian coast, another unit was formed consisting of volunteers from Slovenia, Germany and other neighbouring countries who had arrived in May 1992 at the Croatian Army barracks at Klana. They too were to receive a month of training and weapons purchased from the Slovene Army, but their training was conducted by a former Yugoslav Army officer, and a Kozarac native, General Fikret Cuskic. During the breakup of Yugoslavia, he had been stationed in the Croatian town of Varazdin, but he left the Yugoslav Army in September 1991 when it became clear that it was no longer the genuinely a Yugoslav army, but rather was siding with the Serbs¹³. He joined the Croatian Army as an officer and was the commander of an armoured mechanised

11 In October 1992, a group of fifty men who hid on the mountain during the cleansing of Kozarac, swam across the Una river and arrived in Zagreb. During my fieldwork, I met a father whose son made it to the Croatian border but was accidentally shot by the Croatian Army. Those who did not make it were captured and taken to the JNA barracks on Mount Kozara and subsequently to the Omarska camp or else they remained in hiding on Kozara until late 1993 when the Bosnian Serb Army found and executed them. See ICTY, CSB Banja Luka, Detasman SNB Prijedor, "Plan odbrane u slucaju agresije na podrucje RO Prijedor", 14 May 1993.

12 A large area of Zagreb's Fairground in the southern part of the town. During the Bosnian war, many international humanitarian agencies stored their food and medical supply in warehouses at the Velesajam.

13 ICTY transcripts: Cuskic as a witness and Croatian Vice-Admiral Davor Domazet and his detailed description how the JNA became Serbian Army, 10 Sept 1998, Blaskic case. <http://www.ictytranscripts.org/TrialTranscripts/HTML/transe14/98-09-10-oed.html>

battalion, with responsibility to train all the members of the Croatian tank corps. In May 1992, he requested that he be allowed to provide training for Bosnian volunteers in the HV barracks at Klana and then lead them to Bosnia. By June 21, his unit, the 7th Brigade, was officially endorsed by the Bosnian Army headquarters in Sarajevo. Their journey to Bosnia began on the July 9th, 1992, and they travelled through Hercegovina to Sarajevo, where their first objective was to engage in breaking the siege of Sarajevo from Mount Igman.

In his monograph on the 17th Krajina Brigade, Cuskic describes his observation of the military situation during the two-day journey from Rijeka to Mount Igman. Noticing the absence of Bosnian flags in the Southern region of Hercegovina, and constant checkpoints of the Croatian Defence Council (HVO), they realised that the Bosnian-Croat alliance was crumbling. They managed to get to Central Bosnia relatively uninterrupted, due to the fact that he and a number of other volunteers had been part of the HV and therefore carried with them relevant Croatia accreditation. But they were stopped in Kiseljak, and were not allowed to enter the town on their way to Visoko in Central Bosnia, which was their final destination (Cuskic&Kliko, 2010:50). Upon arrival on Mount Igman, Cuskic observed that the local units of the ARBiH and the HVO seemed to be small, fragmented and operating on the basis of local, territorial defence. When his brigade arrived from Croatia, the morale among the local units rose as they encountered, for the first time, a volunteer unit arriving from outside the country, at a time when the Army consisted mostly of local villagers and townsfolk defending their immediate homes with personal weapons. From the first engagements in battle, Krajisnik units would often be left by the local units, who sometimes cared only about defending their homes rather than counter-offensive combat.¹⁴

The 7th Brigade's first combat involved punching a corridor through Serb lines to the Eastern town of Gorazde, which had been completely besieged by Serb forces. In cooperation with a Foca brigade, and several local units, the 7th Brigade began an

¹⁴ See Bosnian General, Jovan Divjak's assessment of Bosnian forces in 1992. According to him, Sarajevo had only one tank during the beginning of the siege, whilst the JNA, that assisted the formation of the Bosnian Serb Army numbered over 180 tanks. Scarcity of ammunition and weaponry would be a major obstacle for much of the war in creating any form of offensive units within the ARBiH. Even at the end of the war, the Bosnian Army only had 80 tanks. In Magas, B & Zanic, I.(eds) *Rat u Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini: 1991-1995*. Dani, Sarajevo, 1999.

offensive using infiltration tactics, where a small infantry force would attack the enemy rear positions, whilst the rest of the unit would follow up in direct confrontation supported by other units on the flanks. Such sophisticated tactics came as a shock to the Bosnian Serb Army, and the corridor was opened from the eastern slopes of Jahorina mountain, through a deep forest to the entrance to Gorazde, which remained the only link to free territory throughout the war, known as the “put spasa” (survival path). For the 7th Brigade and the local people, this experience proved that it is possible to successfully attack the VRS by exploiting weather conditions, physical terrain, forest and night-time movement and manoeuvre (Cuskic&Kliko, 2010:53). These lessons would serve them well in subsequent engagements, and the myth of the Krajisnik volunteers was born. Their units were to be requested in many parts of Bosnia for special operations before they would be able to finally begin their march towards their own region of Bosanska Krajina.

Meanwhile, the Zagreb volunteers who formed the 1st battalion arrived in the Central Bosnian town of Travnik during July 1992. At the time, Travnik was being shelled by VRS positions on Mount Vlasic to the north. From late May 1992, forcibly deported non-Serbs from Bosanska Krajina, and the survivors of the camps, were routinely dumped at Smet, the last post of the Bosnian Serb line, before being made to walk through no-man’s land across Mount Vlasic to Travnik.¹⁵ By the end of the summer, Travnik was overwhelmed with refugees amounting to approximately forty thousand people. Consequently, the balance of the town’s population was altered, which contributed to rising tension between local inhabitants and the newcomers, on the one hand, and between Croats and Muslims generally on the other. The arrival of the 1st battalion to Travnik only highlighted a sense of invasion of the town. The battalion was immediately stationed on the defence line at Turbe, whilst its base became the former JNA barracks in town. Due to the large influx of refugees, and a lack of accommodation, in the first few months, refugees and soldiers of the 1st Battalion occupied the barracks together. Many encountered their relatives and heard stories of violence that had destroyed family and communities. It was a very difficult time for both groups, as their sense of dispossession intensified as a consequence of meeting

15 See Ed Vulliamy’ testimony at <http://ictytranscripts.dyndns.org/trials/tadic/960607ed.htm>

each other in Central Bosnia. However, for the battalion and its volunteers to become a proper army unit, the refugees needed to be relocated.

In the Autumn of 1992, the VRS unleashed a full-scale attack on Jajce, a town twenty miles south-east of Travnik. Assisting local units of the HVO and ARBiH in guarding their defence lines, the Krajisnik units of the 1st Battalion and 7th Brigade, saw Jajce as a gateway to Bosnian Krajina. Under the command of Jajce forces, for the first time, the 7th Brigade was scattered in different parts of the battlefield. Meanwhile, their commander, Cuskic, observing the frontier between Bosnian and Serb forces, claimed that Jajce could be defended but was in need of heavy weapons. He left for Croatia to obtain the necessary weaponry; but a few days later, on October 29th, Jajce fell. Some argue that the Bosnian forces, the HVO and ARBiH units did not cooperate, and as tensions rose, many left their defence lines. The story of the fall of Jajce remains controversial (Hoare, 2004). Cuskic claimed that the HVO suddenly withdrew without notifying the Jajce forces. On the other hand, two parallel commands existed in the town, and as Cuskic noted, it was illogical for the two to defend this area, each with its own strategy.

Jajce had always been vulnerable to attack, and once Serb forces decided to take over the town, it could not be stopped.¹⁶ The fall of the town saw a massive influx of refugees to Travnik - over fifty thousand Muslims and Croats by some estimates (Maas, 1992). As Travnik was already overwhelmed with the Bosnian Krajina refugees, there was no school or public hall left to take them in. Refugees began sleeping on Travnik streets, in the open, vulnerable to Serb artillery from Mount Vlasic and the situation was extremely volatile. As the Bosnian and HVO units withdrew, Travnik's citizens worried that the city itself would fall. Croats from Jajce continued to Hercegovina and Croatia, whilst many Muslims remained in the area.¹⁷

This was the most difficult time for the people of Bosnian Krajina in Travnik, as Jajce was a symbol of hope for their return: "For us, Krajisniks, Jajce was an important

¹⁶ According to a soldier that fought for the town, the Serb Army was "a mighty army" at the time and there was no way they could hold the positions. September, 2003.

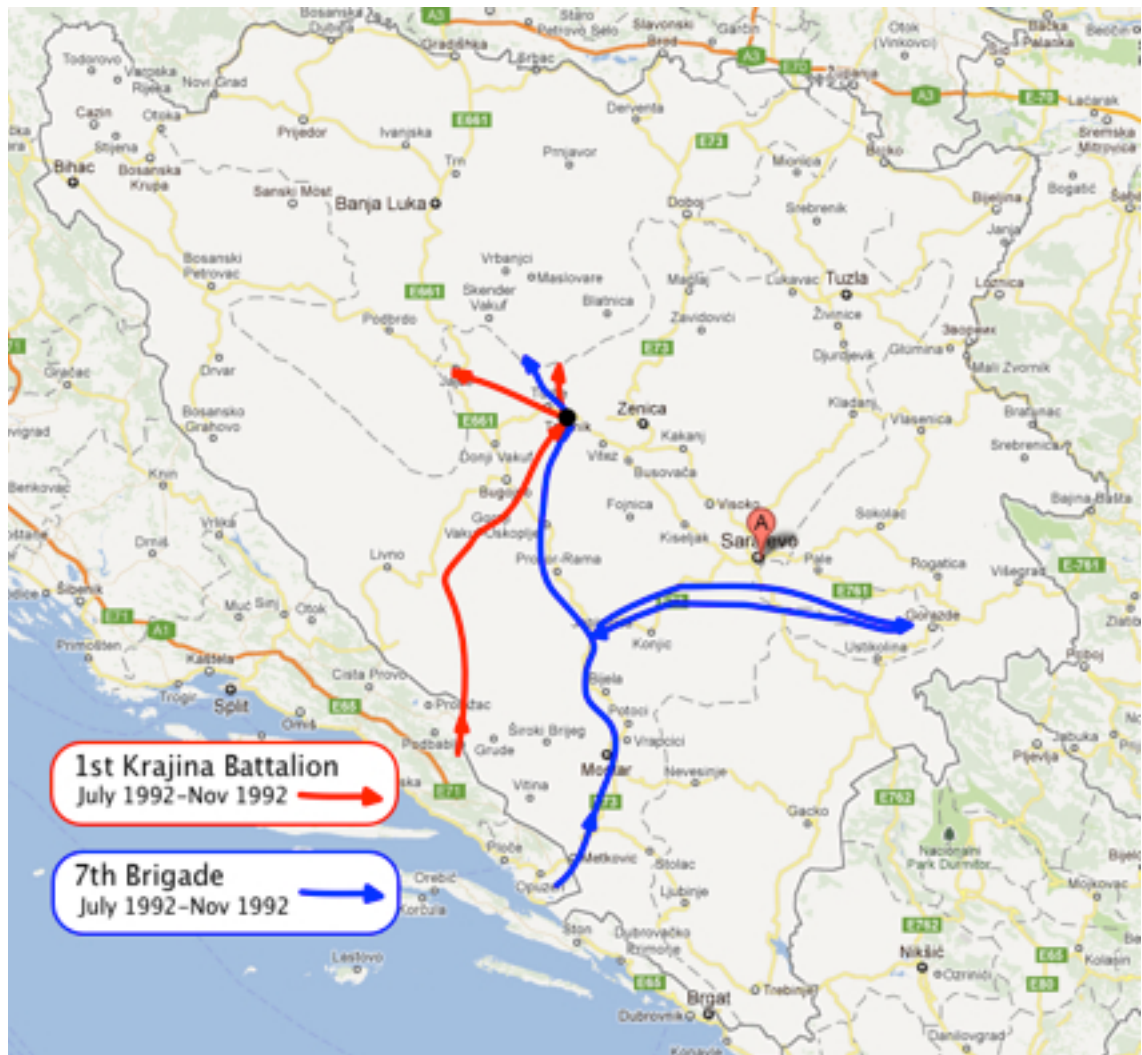
¹⁷ Around the fall of Jajce, Croatia declared that they could not accommodate more Bosnian refugees.

symbol, and we thought from there we could very quickly reach the Sana valley and from there to connect with our forces from the Bihac region. From Jajce, we smelled the Sana and Krajina” (Cuskic, Kliko, 2010:64).

In general, the Bosnian Army military morale was very low resulting in many soldiers, even entire units leaving the army.¹⁸ The 7th Brigade was sent to help in defending Karaula¹⁹, a village close to Travnik where the local troops suffered low morale. In doing so, the units of the 1st Battalion and the 7th Brigade were merged to form the 17th Krajina brigade on November 25th, 1992. All through that winter, apart from defending Travnik, the Brigade organised military training to build on its success near Gorazde and learn from its experience at Jajce.

¹⁸ Travnik’s streets were filled with soldiers selling their guns in order to buy a bus ticket to Croatia. An entire unit consisting of men from Velika Kladusa, Bihac region, that Cuskic brought from Croatia, during one of his trips to logistic centres, left for Croatia.

¹⁹ In defending Karaula, they saved Travnik; however, thirty-two soldiers were badly injured and later transferred to the UK, via logistic centres, for medical treatment. Most of them remained in the UK. See Cuskic&Kliko, *17 Viteska Krajiska Brigada*, 2010.



Map of 17th Brigade operations during the first phase of the war (adapted from Cuskic, F. Klike A.)

*Map of 17th Brigade operations after its unification in
November 1992 (adapted from Cuskic, F. Klike A.)*

The Croat-Muslim War in Central Bosnia

“Every Flag that they see in passing will remind them that this is the living space of the Croatian people”²⁰

“A conflict with the HVO should be avoided at all costs”²¹

My research is not a work of military history, so I will not attempt to deal with a detailed analysis of the course of the war; but it is worth noting the challenges faced by the 17th Brigade during the dark days of the Bosniak-Croat conflict in Central Bosnia, since it was key to their development as a group of people, and as a fighting force. For much of the war, Travnik was the main base for the volunteers of the 17th Krajina Brigade, and the main place where large numbers of those forcibly expelled from Kozarac and Prijedor sought refuge. From the late autumn of 1992 through to 1994, Central Bosnia became the site of a vicious internecine conflict between the Bosnian Croat HVO and the Bosnian Army, with the former centred around Vitez and the latter around Travnik.

There was a large influx of refugees into the existing units of the Bosnian Army (ARBiH), and undoubtedly this demographic change altered the balance of forces in Central Bosnian and made some Croat communities nervous.²² Even in Travnik, locals perceived the newcomers as something of a threat.²³ Other have argued that the Vance-Owen Peace plan, (VOPP) which was evolving throughout the autumn and winter of

20 Dario Kordic, deputy commander of HZ H-B, 1993. See <http://www.ictytranscripts.org/TrialTranscripts/HTML/transe14-2/99-09-23-it.html>

21 Alija Izetbegovic, President of Bosnia and Hercegovina, verbal order to the 3rd Corps at the meeting in Han Bila in the autumn 1992. See, Cuskic, 2010.

22 See the work of American military historian, Charles Shrader, (2003) *A Muslim-Croat Civil War in Central Bosnia: A Military History, 1992-1994*. His research is widely quoted by some Croats keen to claim that the conflict was precipitated by the Bosnian Army. The author uses extensively testimonies from the Hague Tribunal but also several low-ranking HVO officers in Bosnia to make a case that the predominant view of the Bosnian Muslims as the victims of the war is not based on a factual military account of the war. Arguing that the Bosnian government used refugees in Central Bosnia as a highly motivated and revengeful military force, due to their experience of ethnic cleansing, and was therefore the main propagator of the Muslim-Croat conflict. On the other hand, Croats are described as people who had neither reason nor motivation to embark on another war within a war.

23. Bosnian General Jovan Divjak has claimed that Croats perceived the refugees as a group that wanted to take what was taken from them by the Serbs. In Magas, B.& Zanic, I (eds). *Rat u Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini 1991-1995*. Dani, 1999. Also, see M.A. Hoare (2004) *How Bosnia Armed*.

1992, was the principal cause of the conflict. The VOPP offered Bosnian Croats substantially more territory than they held, and more than was warranted in demographic terms, and as Anthony Lloyd wrote at the time, “the proposed borders seemed so ridiculously advantageous to the Bosnian Croats that even they joked that HVO stood for ‘Hvala Vance Owen’ - thank you Vance Owen,”(Lloyd, 2001) which seems to have created an incentive to seize territory assigned to them under the plan, but not yet under their control. Whatever the reality, the VOPP clearly strained relations between Muslims and Croats, who found themselves on the “wrong” side of the line according to the proposed peace plan, and made conflict more likely.²⁴

The Croat-Muslim war began in earnest during early 1993 in Central Bosnia, sparked by hit and run attacks by HVO militia from Hercegovina into mixed and predominantly Muslim towns and villages in the Lasva valley. In Travnik, the commander of the local HVO unit, a former JNA officer, Filip Filipovic appeared reluctant to engage in conflict, and so was released from his duty and a Hercegovinian commander replaced him.²⁵ This was enough to pit local HVO forces and the Bosnian Army against each other, even in towns like Fojnica, which had been regarded as an oasis of peaceful coexistence.²⁶ In April 1993, the worst of these incursions occurred at Ahmici, near Vitez, where approximately 120 civilians were slaughtered and burned by an HVO militia.²⁷

24 For example, military units of HOS, that operated in Hercegovina from May 1992 after being expelled from Croatia - their units consisted of over thirty percent of Bosnian Muslims. Once Herceg-Bosna was created, Croats joined the HVO, whilst their Muslim members were often incarcerated in camps such as Dretelj, in Hercegovina or joined the ARBiH. General Divjak, in Magas, b & Zanic, *I Ratu Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini*.

25 Cuskic testimony <http://www.ictytranscripts.org/TrialTranscripts/HTML/transe47/04-11-22-IT.html>

26 See for example “Anonymous Hero” by Emil Habul, *Oslobodjenje*, Sarajevo, April 8 2000 – translated here: <http://www.cdsp.neu.edu/info/students/marko/oslob/oslob53.html>

27 See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/603420.stm> for a BBC report of the massacre; Croatian journalist Ivo Skoric later unearthed details of alleged Croatian Government complicity in the massacre from the archives of President Tudjman, see <http://list.iskon.hr/pipermail/attack/2000-May/000711.html> for details of his findings.

This was the most difficult period of the war for the 17th Brigade since its formation as a group of volunteers dedicated to returning home²⁸, not least because it served no useful objective in their fight to return home. It was a conflict forced upon them and one that quickly became a fight for survival, because it meant they were cut off and surrounded by hostile forces on all sides²⁹. At the time, their families were living in Croatia and many of them worked in Croatia and continue to receive their salaries there until the end of 1992. They saw Croats as an ally in fighting common enemy - the Bosnian Serb Army. In military terms, although their manpower continue to grow, the brigade was far inferior and just about managed to fight one enemy let alone two. They were an army in the making, but the Muslim-Croat conflict forced the whole population to realise that the only way for them to achieve return was through rigorous training and military restraint that was needed to survive the chaos that prevailed in Travnik throughout the eighteen months of the conflict.

By June 1993, their base at Travnik was under threat, with HVO units fighting to gain control of the town. Under the Vance-Owen plan, Travnik was to be under Croat control, but in addition to being the base for the 17th Brigade, it had a growing Muslim population swollen by thousands of displaced people from Bosnian Krajina. This was regarded as a threat to HVO control of the town, which had been hitherto unchallenged (Omeragic, 1993). The HVO demand that Travnik be included in their Herceg-Bosna mini-state, and that the Bosnian Army be put under their command. This would mean the end of the fight for the Bosnian Krajina units and the end of their struggle to liberate

28 Initially, the unit was composed of volunteers and survivors, however, as the war went on claiming more victims, from the fall of Jajce onwards, many individuals joined the brigade as it was seen to be a mobile unit that might bring the liberation of Bosnia and Hercegovina. There were also foreign individuals, like a Finnish man, Jani Anttola, who wrote a book on his experience in the unit: *Crne Udovice, godinu dana kao dobrovoljac u muslimanskoj jedinici u Bosni*, 1998. But also, a number of survivors who left Bosnia returned as they could not deal with their traumatic memories: *"In Copenhagen, I drank. I started to lose control of myself. These things tie themselves in knots inside you – guilt, memories, ghosts. I was starting to go mad, but it was pointless talking to the psychiatrist, so I did nothing, all day. But now I feel all right again"*.

29 From the beginning of 1993, the HVO put its troops on elevated positions around Travnik but also on all important communication and strategic posts. As a result, nothing could be brought into town without going through a HVO checkpoint. They also developed a strategy of fighting in which they would encircle a town or a village and take over one place at a time. Controlling important military positions also meant that UNPROFOR or any other foreign monitoring agency had to attempt to pass through those checkpoints. Many observers noted that they were often asked or forced to return to their base without allowing them to continue their job. See <http://www.ictytranscripts.org/TrialTranscripts/HTML/transe14-2/99-09-23-it.html>, See also, Cuskic, *Monografija 17KKB*.

the Bosnian Krajina.³⁰ With their superior numbers and discipline, it took just a few days for the 17th Brigade to secure the town, and push the HVO towards Bosnian Serb lines on Mount Vlasic. Many HVO soldiers and thousands of Croat civilians were forced to surrender to the Serbs.

The peace negotiations that followed in Geneva throughout the summer of 1993 often reflected the situation on the ground, and vice versa. It is argued, for example, that at the time of Geneva talks, “Serb and Croat forces were making their own deals on the ground, leaving the Muslims under pressure at every level”(Rhodes, 1993). Indeed, the 17th Brigade believed that the Serbs who commanded the Vlasic features above Travnik had made similar deals with the HVO (Cuskic&Kliko, 2010). As one soldier of the brigade recalls: “the war against the Croats felt like a medieval battle in an arena where we were fighting for survival while the Serbs acted as observers, waiting to see who will be left standing to fight them”.³¹ Later, as the Bosnian Army threatened to completely defeat the HVO, the same political process would lead to the 17th Brigade being ordered not to advance on Vitez even though they were only 5 km away from its centre, in order to maintain pressure on the HVO whilst negotiations continued.

Until the middle of 1993, the 17th Brigade had been driven and motivated by a single clear objective, and their stories and conversations revolved around the idea of what they would do when they reached their homes. Suddenly, in this meaningless conflict in Central Bosnia, all they could think about was how to survive a brutal and exhausting conflict where each house and street was a frontline, and where there were many casualties on both sides because neither army had a way out. Sandwiched between the Croat forces in Central Bosnia and Serb forces on Vlasic, the 17th Brigade lacked basic supplies and even now, when reflecting on those times, they still recoil from the memory of wounded soldiers who died because there was no way of getting them to medical care. They had only one helicopter available to carry the wounded, but it would only fly if there were six casualties, otherwise they could not “waste” the fuel.³²

30 Interview Faruk Sivic, 28. September 2003.

31 Interview with a soldier of 17KB, September 2003. Also, see ARBiH General Divjak's similar reflection that for the Bosnian Serb Army (VRS) 1993 was a year of break. In Magas, B & Zanic, I. *Rat u Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini*.

32 In conversation with former soldiers, Kozarac, August 2003.

The nature of this phase of the conflict is illustrated by the story of one operation around Vitez where, after a successful offensive on a hill above the town, a 17th Brigade unit dug in close to a village in the vicinity of Vitez. The following day, Croat women from the village came close to the frontline and said they knew that it was the 17th Brigade that was fighting them, and they knew that the brigade was from North-West Bosnia. They asked why they were fighting there, although they understood that their families had been expelled from Bosnia, and they began to cry as they asked about their own husbands and sons. According to soldiers who were there, what followed was not the usual crude exchange of words that often takes place across front lines, but a strange, thoughtful silence. The soldiers knew that the men the women asked about lay dead behind them where they had fought the previous day. It was not that they suddenly felt guilty for fighting, but the words of the Croat women suddenly brought home to them the fact that they had no families to return to in Travnik, nor anybody to mourn them should they die there in Central Bosnia.

Hearing these women crying and asking for their loved ones, it sounds like a paradox, but we felt deprived of the bond and care that one's family offers. In the last two years, we had been far from our homes, and our families were mainly outside Bosnia. That is why we were so quiet. We remembered our families and felt that familial care... We did not feel guilty. We did not empathise with them. In all of it, we only felt deprived...³³

After the breakdown of peace talks based on the revised Owen-Stoltenberg plan in the autumn of 1993, the US government began to play a greater role in diplomatic efforts to end the war, and they sought an end to the Muslim-Croat conflict. By late 1993, the Bosnian Army had the upper hand in Central Bosnia, and a kind of uneasy stalemate had been reached. The US-brokered Washington agreement of March 1994, which created a Federation between Muslims and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, finally brought an end to this conflict, meaning the 17th Brigade could focus on its main objective; but, looking back, it also set the scene for a two-way division of Bosnia and then creation of Republika Srpska.³⁴

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ See http://www.usip.org/library/pa/bosnia/washagree_03011994.html for details of the agreement.

*War-time funeral for a 17th Brigade soldier in Travnik.
Source “svabine sahare” via Kozarac.ba*

Conquering Mount Vlasic, overcoming fear

During 1994, the third year of war, the mobile units of the 17th Brigade had gained vast experience and had engaged in many different battlefields across Bosnia. Not having their own homes to defend created a sense that the only way for them to operate was as an offensive unit, in contrast to the largely defensive character of the Bosnian Army. Hence “they had the courage of those with nothing to lose, with nowhere else to go.”(McDonagh, 1995) They fought because of their desire to reach their former homes. This gave them some of the characteristics and spirit of a liberation movement within the Bosnian Army.

In April 1994, the 7th Corps was formed, based in Travnik and subsuming the 17th Brigade under its command.³⁵ During this year, it focused on taking the dominant feature of the region, Mount Vlasic, and whilst it slowly gained some territory, Serbs continued to dominate the mountain. Mount Vlasic is the highest peak in Bosnia; and, at 2000m, it overlooks the city of Travnik but also around 10% of the entire territory of Bosnia. It was held by Serb forces from the beginning of the war, and they used it to bombard most of the surrounding towns and villages in Central Bosnia. For Serbs, Vlasic was “the roof of Republic of Srpska”, and it held similar strategic importance for Bosnia and the Bosnian Army. Importantly, the mountain was very difficult to capture, because aside from a single easily defensible route up the mountain from the south-east, the only other lines of attack faced sheer cliffs on the mountain’s south and eastern faces. Vlasic was also the location for an important telecommunications tower at Opaljenik. The tower was used from the beginning of the war in 1992 by the JNA and later the Bosnian Serb Army for re-transmitting TV Serbia into RS. Hence the Bosnian Army’s aim was to “turn the propaganda around” by taking it over and transmitting Sarajevo television to Serbian held territory (McDonagh, 1995). Another key strategic aim for the Bosnian Army during the war had always been to join up its 5th and 7th Corps based in Bihac and Travnik respectively, to free the Bihac pocket, divide Serbian forces and create a powerful western front that could push them back towards their Banja Luka stronghold and beyond (Musinbegovic et al, 1999). Mount Vlasic stood as a

³⁵ Primary source for this chapter was the 7th Corps’ newspaper, *Sloboda* (Freedom), published in Travnik throughout the war. *Sloboda* is not available in public. I was given access to a personal archive of several former soldiers of the 17th brigade.

physical and symbolic obstacle that prevented the Bosnian Army from achieving this. From the beginning of the formation of the 7th Corps, their combat direction was to be towards the north-western Bosnia, which led across the mountain.

As the gateway to north-west Bosnia, Vlasic stood between the 17th Krajina Brigade and their homes, from which many of them had been ethnically cleansed in the summer of 1992. The importance of returning one's home is well depicted by a soldier of the brigade:

After all the killing, there are only two things...Home, and time. Home, because that is where we have to be in the end. And time, because that's what it takes to get there. I've stopped counting the time since I last saw home; I think it's three years we've been living in the forests. All I can count are the days until I get back. They burned our houses but they can't burn the land. And they can't fight time. Home and time. There's nothing else left...This war is the war to go home. (Vulliamy, 1995)

Vlasic had itself been touched by the Serbian ethnic cleansing campaign in 1992. When Bosnian Muslims and Croats were released from the camps in North-west Bosnia, they were most often transported to the mountain and then left to wander over the front lines to the relative safety of Travnik. These convoys were often stopped by Serb soldiers operating on the mount Vlasic, who would sometimes take girls away from their family and into the forest:

They set apart about thirty girls. They separated an old woman from her two daughters; she protested, cried, went down on her knees and begged, but there was no mercy, she got a bullet in the head. The girls were taken to an unknown destination and even today it is not known.³⁶

According to one soldier, when Vlasic was finally liberated, they stumbled across a bunker on which was written "do not enter" and found a mass grave containing corpses with women's clothes.³⁷ In some cases, camp survivors were taken to the mountain to be killed rather than released. For example, the massacre at the Korican cliffs on August 21, 1992, saw around 200 men shot and dumped in a ravine, with only seven

36 See http://www.lawschool.cornell.edu/library/cijwww/icjwww/idocket/ibhy/ibhyorders/ibhy_iapplication_19930320.htm.

37 Conversation with soldiers, September 1995.

survivors (IWPR, 1999). *“We were told to line up along the cliffs and kneel there. Then the horrible shooting started. I was falling into the abyss,”* recounts Medo Sivac, a survivor of the massacre.³⁸ Later, he was found by the Bosnian Serb Army and taken to Banja Luka hospital. This was one of the only atrocities that the Bosnian Serb leadership ever acknowledged during the war. Yet there was no investigation at the time, nor seven years later when the Serbian newspaper *Nezavisne Novine* published an extensive article about the massacre. The Koricani massacre was certainly in the minds of the 17th Brigade when they looked up at Serb positions on Vlasic. For many soldiers in the 17th Brigade, then, Vlasic was the first “graveyard” they wanted to recover on their long march towards home in north-west Bosnia. Many of them had walked across the mountain in 1992 as broken men, after surviving the horrors of the camps, and all that mattered now was to walk back across the mountain in the other direction to defeat those who had destroyed their homes and families:

*Vlasic shackles are being broken, Bosnian strength crashed it and that reminds me of a time when it was born [17Kb]..., it all coincided with the time when I was on that same mountain, humiliated and helpless, dragged in a truck, July 92, and was made to walk from Smetovi to Travnik, a route taken, before and after me, by thousands wretched Krajisniks.*³⁹

By the summer of 1994, the 7th Corps led by General Mehmed Alagic realised that if they were to take this immense mountain, it would only be possible during the winter, and Alagic concluded that his forces must use the weather to their advantage (McDonagh, 1995, Musinbegovic et al, 1999). For example, the communication tower Opaljenik, at the peak of the mountain, was heavily mined, as were other features of the mountain, and to reach them safely was only possible when the snow was so deep that soldiers could walk without activating the mines. At the end of 1994, a four-month ceasefire had been brokered by the international community. This gave the Bosnian Army enough time to prepare itself for the attack on Vlasic. In fact, preparation was already underway in the summer of 1994 when the Army began to employ civilians in a Travnik factory to make special white camouflage uniforms from Scandinavian material sent from abroad by the Bosnian Krajina diaspora. Bosnian generals decided to be on

38 Bosnian Serb newspapers, *Nezavisne Novine*, “Tracking Down The Crimes At Koricani Near Knezevo in August 1992”, 1999. The publishing of a series on war crimes led to an assassination of Zeljko Kopanja, in October 22, 1999.

39 *Sloboda*, Travnik, 15. April 1995, no: 1. p.4.

constant alert throughout this time, aware that ceasefires tended to be honoured mostly in the breach.⁴⁰

The first attempt to infiltrate Serbian positions took place on 24 February, 1995, known as operation “Domet-95”, in the region of Galica. A Bosnian brigade spent hours secretly climbing the sheer rocks of the Galica slope, before attacking the Serbian Army bunker at the top. However, once up there, they could not see signs of the planned supporting operations from other brigades, and they panicked and began a chaotic retreat. Nevertheless, Serb soldiers were indeed surprised and lost approximately 60 soldiers, with many more wounded. As a result, fear also began to spread amongst units of the Bosnian Serb Army on Mount Vlasic (Musinbegovic at al, 1999:34-36). The Bosnian Serb Army 1st Krajina Corps stationed there at the time was “spread thinly covering the area from Vlasic to Bihac” (Ibid, 34-36).

For the Bosnian Army, which was keen to continue offensive actions, this military setback was turned into a positive experience. It was partially successful to the extent that Bosnian soldiers proved themselves to have mastered the physical barrier of this enormous mountain and reached a Serb position that many doubted it was possible to reach. However, as the commander of the 17th Krajina Brigade, Fikret Cuskic remarked: “we did not master ourselves”(Musinbegovic at al, 1999:138). That is, they did not master their own psychological fear of the task that was put forward to them. This was seen as the reason why the operation “Domet-95” did not succeed.

Memories of ethnic cleansing and thoughts about missing family members were always with the 17th Brigade soldiers. As one put it: “during the offensive, one only had to think of those tortured family members in the camp to have the courage and will to continue the fight.”⁴¹ However, the Bosnian army realised that an important ingredient in effective combat and morale was not just motivation but also a “clear vision of the reason to fight”, and “the importance of realising that this particular battle is

40 *Sloboda*, Iz pozdravnog govora generala Alagica – “Sastat cemo se mi negdje u Krajini”, p.3.

41 Interview Faruk Sivac, 20 September 2003.

necessary” (Musinbegovic at al, 1999:183).⁴² According to Commander Hasib Musinbegovic, who was responsible for improving morale in the 17th Brigade, “this is the foundation for practical behaviour in creating morale amongst soldiers” (Ibid, 54). The 7th Corps command insisted that they needed to help the 5th Corps in Bihac if they were to connect the two Bosnian Krajina Corps. For the soldiers of the 17th Krajina Brigade, as we have seen, there was another, more specific and fundamental reason: the desire to return home. In the words of one soldier:

When war is your whole life, you have to know what you are fighting for. And I know: not for some total power in Bosnia, like the Serbs want, nor is it revenge. I'm fighting for a normal life – to go home. Simple as that.
(Vulliamy, 1995)

The fears that manifested themselves during the first attack were thoroughly analysed and dealt with during an intensive 21-day training programme that took place immediately after the “Domet-95” operation. On Vlasica in winter, the temperature can drop to minus 20-30 degrees Celsius, and harsh winds and snow make it hard to see where one is going. The possibility to freeze or wander off into a Serb position was very real. These were the kind of concerns that occupied every soldier’s thoughts. General Alagic was aware of this, and therefore insisted upon his claim that the harsh conditions were the only way for the Army to win this battle. To overcome fear, he insisted, “one has to think about night or weather as our advantage. These are our allies” (Musinbegovic at al, 1999:178). Musinbegovic, as a commander for morale, emphasised that “the enemy is scared of the 7th Corps” and, as Alagic pointed out, this type of fear “conquers the enemy as it is a fear within him.” (Ibid: 183)⁴³ They emphasised the contrast with “our fear that is more real, such as weather” to show that this was something that could be overcome (Ibid:183) To conquer their fear of the weather, the Bosnian Army invited doctors to demonstrate techniques that would help the soldiers to survive the harsh conditions and stay alive. Another problem that had to

⁴² Charles Moskos noticed that “an understanding of the combat soldier’s motivation required a simultaneous appreciation of both the role of small groups and the underlying value commitments of combat soldiers”. In other words, a soldier will only be effective if either he has a specific purpose or is fighting for some wider ideology or values. See, Colonel Charles W. Brown, US Army, Charles C. Moskos Jr, “The American Volunteer Soldier: Will He Fight?”, *Military Review*, June 1976.

⁴³ Ibid, 183. General Alagic argued that the fear within is the biggest downfall of any unit regardless of its manpower or technical superiority.

be overcome was a weakness in the process of giving and following orders among commanders of the 7th Corps units. The reliance of one brigade on another, as was shown in the first attack, had to be changed. It was important that each brigade and each soldier should focus only on their own task, without worrying what others would do. Similarly, commanders had to issue orders in a decisive manner and soldiers had to respect those orders. In order to achieve this, Alagic stressed the importance of unity in action:

“It is like a chain. The chain is strong as long as each of the link is strong. If one link breaks the whole chain is broken. Therefore, our strength lies in “ourselves” not in an individual. You have to be conscious of it.” (Ibid:183)

*The 17th Brigade in action towards the end of the war
(Cuskic, F. Klike A.).*

The Journey Home

A month later, on the March 20th, operation “Domet - 1” began. It took only five days to capture many of Vlasic’s most important features (Kozar, 1995:3), and this time the Bosnian Army concentrated on holding on to territories they had taken (Musinbegovic at al, 1999:66). The central plateau of Vlasic was captured, and “the roof of Bosnia” was now in the hands of the Bosnian state. On April 10th, the telecommunication tower Opaljenik was taken. This success contributed to an immense increase in morale amongst not only the 7th Corps, but the entire Bosnian Army. Vlasic “proved to be the best source of motivation and combat morale” they had experienced in a long time (Musinbegovic, 1999:86, Evan, 1995). Moreover, the significance of Operation Vlasic were felt around the world as Bosnian society, politicians, friends from abroad, and international organisations began to discuss, for the first time, the possibility of the Bosnian Army liberating the entire country (Musinbegovic, 1999:86-89). Travelling with General Alagic as he entered the symbolic hunting lodge at Babanovac on the peak of Mount Vlasic, which his troops had just secured, the sense of achievement was plain to see. When asked what support or assistance the 7th Corps needed to continue their journey home, his answer was simple: “Nothing. We are fine.”⁴⁴ I sat with him in a make-shift command centre as unit commanders radioed in to report that the Serb forces were on the run and asking what to do. Their sense of the war having finally turned around was palpable. Other successes followed as a consequence of capturing mount Vlasic. Most importantly, for the soldiers of the 17th Krajina Brigade, they were now in a position to proceed towards their ultimate objective. After three years of combat in Central Bosnia and elsewhere, the Bosnian Krajina soldiers would, in the summer of 1995, finally begin their long awaited journey home towards north-west Bosnia.

For Serbs, the Vlasic defeat heralded a major crisis, both militarily and politically and caused a rift between Radovan Karadzic and General Ratko Mladic (Swarm, 1994). Despite the fact that their media attempted to hide the defeat, Bosnian television was now available in Republika Srpska, and it showed the Bosnian flag flying from the TV relay tower on Vlasic. Military and political figures in Republika Srpska quarrelled

44 Personal interview with General Mehmet Alagic Mount Vlasic, Bosnia, September 1995.

about who was to blame, but the fact was that Serbian soldiers were not motivated to fight far from their homes, regardless of their superiority in weaponry (Ibid). As Serbian commentator Stanko Cerovic wrote at the time: “[sometimes] defeat [can be] cleverer than winning” (Cerovic, 1995:27). According to Cerovic, what the peace process had needed since the beginning of the war was for the stronger Bosnian Serb side to suffer at least one military defeat to bring home to them the need for serious and concerted negotiations to end the war. Whilst they could not be challenged on the battlefield, they had no incentive to seek an end to the war (Ibid:27). Cerovic was not alone in this view, and indeed this point was one of the founding principles of US Government thinking about how to end the war from 1993 onwards, and they had pursued a ‘balance of threat’ between the parties on the ground by providing limited covert support to Bosnian forces and by threatening the use of air strikes against Serb forces in response to attacks on the so-called UN Safe Areas (Holbrook, 1999).

At the time, events in Croatia had opened the way for the start of a major combined offensive across western Bosnia involving both the Croatian and Bosnian Armies. In May 1995, Operation Flash had seen the Croatian Army re-take Western Slavonia, and in early August, the Croatian Army launched Operation Storm to re-take the Croatian Serb stronghold of Knin and the rest of the Serb-held Krajina in Croatia (Magas & Zanic, 2001: 67-84) On August 6th, this operation broke the siege of the Bihac pocket in north-west Bosnia and opened up a route for a combined Croatian-Bosnian offensive towards Bosnia’s second city, Serb-held Banja Luka. In September, following their victories on Vlasica and at Donji Vakuf, the 17th Brigade were earmarked to play a vital role in this combined offensive. They were to move north towards Jajce, where they were to take the town in cooperation with the Croatian HVO, before proceeding further north towards their homes. In late September, Travnik was buzzing with preparations for the “the march of return”(Hodzic, 1998:260-261) as the 17th Brigade and other parts of the 7th Corps began what they hoped would be a major operation to defeat the Bosnian Serbs and liberate Bosnia-Herzegovina. For three years, Travnik had been the base for soldiers and refugees from Bosnian Krajina, and now they were leaving it in the hands of its own citizens as they began their march home. At the head of the procession, symbolically, was the strongest unit in general Mehmed Alagic’s 7th Corps, comprising thousands of soldiers of the 17th Krajina Brigade (Hodzic, 1996:6).

After a series of fast-moving battles around Jajce, Kljuc and as far forward as the Manjaca hill, close to the site of the infamous camp, the Bosnian Army had Serb forces on the run and, after re-taking Sanski Most, it finally had Prijedor in its sights. But on October 13, 1995, as peace talks began, the Bosnian Government was asked to cease all offensive operations, and so the 17th Brigade once again found its progress halted, and set up camp in Sanski Most on what would become the border of the Federation.

*17th Brigade soldiers gather for the march towards
Bosanska Krajina (Cuskic, F. Klike A.)*

*General Cuskic, recounting the crucial battle for Galica,
Mount Vlasic, in 2004*

Dayton Peace Plan: Legalising division

After hectic negotiations in Dayton, Ohio, a final peace agreement was signed in Paris on November 21, 1995 that would lead to the deployment of a large US-led Implementation Force (IFOR). Ceasefire lines became demarcation lines and eventually the borders of two legally-separate entities. The 17th Brigade found themselves on one side, whilst their homes and the scene of the crimes that had spurred them on remained tantalisingly close on the other side of the line. It is no coincidence that when the ceasefire began, the two sides held roughly 50% of Bosnia-Herzegovina each. There were a few minor trade-offs, with the Croatian Army pulling back from its positions in Mrkonjic Grad to ensure that Republika Srpska would finally constitute the 49% of Bosnian territory envisaged by the Contact Group plan. The “facts on the ground” that European governments had been so reluctant to reverse throughout the war now reflected the roughly 50-50 division implied by the latest in a long line of peace plans, the so-called Contact Group plan.

When the war had begun, in April 1992, the European Community took the lead in the peace process, culminating in the January 1993 Vance-Owen peace plan (VOPP) that sought to cantonise Bosnia-Herzegovina along roughly ethnic lines. The VOPP in fact served only to intensify the war because it offered the Bosnian Croat leadership more territory than it held, so they proceeded to capture the additional territory in anticipation of these gains being ratified by the international community. By the time of the second major initiative, the Owen-Stoltenberg plan (OSP) in the summer of 1993, the US government was becoming more critical of European diplomatic pressure on the Bosnian Government, whom they perceived as the victims of aggression, and advocated an alternative approach. They favoured a combination of military pressure on the Serbs (lifting the arms embargo on the Bosnian government and selective air strikes against Bosnian Serb forces in response to violations of UN resolutions) and forceful negotiation, which contrasted with the European approach of simply facilitating negotiations among the parties and trying to persuade the weaker Bosnian government side to accept defeat as a way of ending the war quickly. In words of Richard Holbrook: “the west could not expect the Serbs to be conciliatory at the negotiating table as long as they had experienced nothing but success on the battlefields” (Holbrook, 1999).

With tacit US support, the Bosnian government voted to reject the Owen-Stoltenberg Plan, and the US set about trying to rectify the Muslim-Croat conflict as a precursor to a simpler two-way division of Bosnia. The Washington agreement of 1994 sought to achieve this, and laid out plans for a Muslim-Croat Federation within a loose confederation with Croatia. The agreement also opened the way for military training and support to Croatia. At the same time, the US convened a Contact Group of leading nations (US, UK, Russia, France and Germany), who would seek to use their influence with the parties to bring about a negotiated settlement. The US sought to use the Croatian Army as a strategic ally to achieve the simple two-way split (actually a 51%-49% division) envisaged by the evolving Contact Group Plan. At the same time, they increased military pressure on the Bosnian Serbs through NATO, and the UN force (UNPROFOR) became increasingly marginalised (Cohen & Stamskoski, 1996). From mid-1994 onwards, the Bosnian Serbs responded by seeking to complete their military campaign in advance of any settlement by attacking remote outposts of Bosnian territory, most notably the eastern enclaves such as Srebrenica.

The Dayton Peace Agreement gave Serbs their Republika Srpska, with almost half of Bosnia under their control. Croatia won US support, and although Bosnian Croats had to compromise on territory, they would be given a leading role in the Bosnian Federation. The Bosnian Government saw an end to the war that was killing so many of its citizens, whilst maintaining at least the veneer of a unitary state. The question is: where did this leave 17th Krajina Brigade and its soldiers?

*Bosnian Army newspaper covering the battle for Kljuc
(Sloboda, 7th Corps)*

Sanski Most: an influx of refugees and a new displacement

*After three and half years of war, we, soldiers from Prijedor, Banja Luka and other Bosnian Krajina towns that according to the Dayton peace agreement belong to Republika Srpska; overnight became displaced persons in the Federation.*⁴⁵

For several months after the ceasefire, most soldiers were enjoying what they thought would be a temporary break before the battle for Prijedor resumed. Sanski Most became a focal point for an influx of refugees, including both those who had homes here before the war and those who were from the still-occupied Prijedor region. A several hundreds of refugees were forced to return from Germany as the German government claimed that it was safe to begin the return. They arrived in Sanski Most. Upon arrival, the indigenous people of Sanski Most praised the 17th Brigade for liberating their town, whilst those from Prijedor region felt “cheated” by the peace and group sent young men to join the unit in expectation of what they thought would be the battle to free their homes. The unit still enjoyed its “celebrity” status, earned during the war for its bravery and, as one soldier later remarked, they “subconsciously got used to the role of being great, special, immense and unique...” despite their main objective remaining unfulfilled.⁴⁶ At the same time, the joint Croat-Muslim operation in western Bosnia ensured an undisturbed supply of food and ammunition for the first time since the war began. They felt equipped and “more ready than ever” before. As the commander of the 17th Brigade, Fikret Cuskic, remarked:

*“Dayton stopped us when we were on the verge of the realising of our objective and when we had, for the first time since the war began, complete superiority in all spheres of military combat.”*⁴⁷

However, operating on “their own home ground” was to subtly change the attitude of the 17th Brigade soldiers, and in some ways it brought home to them just what they had been through for the first time. Their proximity to the Prijedor region brought their memories of ethnic cleansing back to life, and the discovery of mass graves was a stark

45 A former soldier personal interview September 2003.

46 Interview Faruk Sivac, 28 September 2003.

47 Interview Fikret Cuskic, 2 October 2003

reminder of what had happened in the region (Hodzic, 1995:6). One 17th Brigade soldier, upon entering Sanski Most, remembered a place where he was beaten up in 1992, and almost immediately his body was overtaken by fear. According to a soldier who was with him at the time, “he began to shake and started wondering why he was still fighting.”⁴⁸ In a single moment, he became overwhelmed with memories of his experiences in 1992, with the result that he did not want to fight any more, having re-discovered feelings of vulnerability and the fear of losing his life. Anecdotal evidence and stories told by the soldiers also suggest that being surrounded by reminders of the ethnic cleansing of 1992 brought back memories and prompted the re-telling of stories about the torture and disappearance of family members to such an extent that some soldiers switched almost instantly from feeling invulnerable to being almost paralysed by fear. Three years of fighting in Central Bosnia had numbed their emotions in the face of everyday exposure to the extreme conditions of life and death on the frontline, but now they were coming back.

At the beginning of 1996, the soldiers of the 17th Brigade were finally told that there was no immediate prospect of a resumption of hostilities, which meant that the ceasefire lines had become an “inter-entity boundary” and they were to be demobilised. This came as a shock, and was seen by many as a political betrayal of their cause.

*All our aims fell through: fight for our homeland, Bosnia, right for everyone to return to their town, village ...making those who committed genocide accountable, finding mass graves... After three and half years of war, we, soldiers from Prijedor, Banja Luka and other Bosnian Krajina towns that according to the Dayton peace agreement belong to the Republika Srpska; overnight became displaced persons in Federation.*⁴⁹

For these people, the war had begun with their expulsion and (in most cases) incarceration in the summer of 1992, and as the survivors of ethnic cleansing, they had become either “displaced persons” within their own country or refugees abroad. They had responded by forming what they regarded as a liberation army, and returned to Bosnia to fight their way back home. They experienced three years of some of the most intense fighting of the Bosnian war, during which time they arguably did more than any

48 Interview Faruk Sivac, 15 September 2003.

49 Interview Faruk Sivac, 28 September 2003.

other army unit to defend Bosnia (Mehic, 1995) Their bitter internecine conflict in central Bosnia had been a straightforward fight for survival, but they emerged from that horror to win a crucial victory on Mount Vlasic, which definitively turned the tide of the war and laid the groundwork for the counter-offensive of September-October 1995 that would ultimately end the war.

Those soldiers from the Prijedor and Banja Luka regions had become citizens of the Republika Srpska they had fought so hard to defeat – an ethnically-based statelet that was forged through ethnic cleansing and legalised at Dayton, but within which they were obviously less than welcome. At the very moment the war formally ended for the 17th Brigade, with their journey home still unfulfilled, many of them became “displaced persons” once again in their new home of Sanski Most, which lay within the Bosniak-Croat Federation across the inter-entity boundary line from Prijedor. Others, who were from the newly liberated regions of Sanski Most and Kljuc, had a different experience of Dayton. They went home and thus some kind of normality could be restored in their lives. Inevitably, this also caused a division among the hitherto united 17th Brigade soldiers, as their destinies now took very different directions.⁵⁰

Those who did not go home now felt vulnerable as displaced persons, and abandoned by post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was occupying itself with finding solutions to the problems created by war. In addition, the demobilised soldiers, with nothing to show for three years of fighting, had to explain to their own families why they had failed to take Prijedor. Many began to withdraw from society and could only feel understood and protected amongst their own: *“Suddenly we felt as outsiders, we felt as though we would be, individually, targeted by all those with unfulfilled expectations. Outside our own circle, we felt unprotected and without support...”*⁵¹

50 Interview Fikret Cuskic, 2 October 2003.

51 Interview Faruk Sivac, 28 September 2003.

*They were forced to leave home, but they did not betray Bosnia,
Shoulder to shoulder, brother next to brother,
17th a famous brigade, hero beside hero,
With a song embark on a combat, Bosnia is in their heart.*

*Many difficult battles they experienced,
all over Bosnia are known,
They will not give up, they vowed
until they see translucent waters of Sana*

17th brigade, a famous brigade...

*They will take Prijedor town,
Sanicu, Sanu but also Kozarac
They do not lament giving their life up,
For its people to return⁵²*

During my fieldwork, I have encountered several lost souls who were once heroes of the 17th Brigade, but who are now drunk, washed up and with no prospects for the future. Modri, a survivor of the camp, joined the 17th brigade in Travnik. He was one of the first to return with his mother. Modri was wounded several times in the war, as a result of which, his stomach would seem to have never healed. He often walked on the main street of Kozarac, and would stop passers-by asking for money for him to attend a clinic or for transport to the town of Prijedor. He would approach a person, show his bloody wound, with its overwhelming stench, be given some money and then walk away. During one of our meetings on the road, his comrade approached me and explained that for many years they have been providing financial support for Modri, for food and house bills, but they realised that he only used the money to support his drug addiction. In the last two years, his war friends have attempted to send him to the local rehabilitation clinic in Prijedor, but he always returned. In the winter of 2010, Modri was found frozen to death in his house. The feeling of guilt among many of his former comrades that they could not help him, and that there were no local institutions that wanted to care for this former soldier, prompted them to build him a proper gravestone in December 2011.

52 Sloboda, 1994.

The experience of demobilised soldiers of the 17th brigade is very similar to many soldiers upon coming home (Larisson, 2009). Many have no prospect of a job, and find it difficult to engage in everyday tasks, feeling lost and confused. But the most profound feeling is an overnight change from being a hero to becoming homeless once again, and a sense of despair that only the war profiteers benefited from the conflict ⁵³ In some cases, the state offers some kind of psychological or economic assistance, but in this case the former soldiers received “vouchers” ⁵⁴ - in case they want to buy a home or business, they can get a discount. As they became once again displaced persons, and with the return of the indigenous residents of Sanski Most, they had to leave the flats and houses they occupied immediately after liberating the town. As Cuskic argued at the time, many could not deal with the new circumstances, and a large number of former soldiers left Bosnia. ⁵⁵ Some of those who remained in Sanski Most and reunited with their exiled families very quickly felt “unwanted” in Sanski Most and became known as “*kesari*” - literally “bag people”.

The war presidency of Prijedor in exile decided to relocate their offices and people to Lusci Palanki, a place twenty kilometres from Sanski Most, deep in a valley surrounded by the mount Grmec, which would be their next temporary home until return began. Most of the population of Lusci Palanka used to be Serbs, but they fled when the Bosnian Army advanced towards the area in September 1995. The town was not damaged, but the residents took everything with them when they left. Many returnees recall time spent in Palanka as a positive experience, when they were at least self-sufficient in all spheres of life, and had a feeling that they were all contributing towards the anticipated return. They cultivated farmland, opened a factory, a nursery and also helped in setting up a tent for the remains of their families being brought back there from mass graves that were being discovered around Prijedor.

⁵³ In a Bosnian TV documentary “Fantazija,” (2007) five demobilised soldiers from Tuzla talk about a feeling of being useless, relying on social services that hardly cover bills, and how they watch those who did not fight being enriched by the war “as though I fought for them not Bosnia, not my family or freedom,” in the words of one soldier.

⁵⁴ When I travelled to Sanski Most in March 1996, former soldiers were showing me, proudly, their vouchers, confirming that the Bosnian government had not forgotten them. At the time, one could detect their anxiety about the future, as they already felt unfit for the normal life. The newspapers wrote “the only job one can hope to get is to wash cars or work on the petrol station. Then IFOR arrived and required translators. Bougarel (2006) makes similar point in his article The Shadow of Heroes, claiming that by the end of 1990's, privileges enjoyed by the combatants were largely illusory.

⁵⁵ Many settled in Chicago and a small minority joined their families in the UK.

Bosnia and Herzegovina under the Dayton Peace Agreement
and the front lines at the end of 1995

*Territorial control at the end of the war overlaid with the
post-Dayton inter-entity boundary. Source: OHR.*

Chapter 2: Return

Our goal is clear. The goal is to return. Return is possible through the implementation of the Dayton agreement ... Of course it is clear with whom we deal. However, it is the cost of reintegration of BiH and we are faced with all realities. Indeed, for us Prijedorcanine, it is an aggravating circumstance that sometimes against our will have to sit down with those who are to blame for all this. However, in it, we see our chance and the possibility of returning to our town and we shall do our best to use it in the best possible way. (Hukanovic, 1996)

As we have seen, the Bosnian Army 17th Brigade was defined by the quest to return home to towns and villages in north-west Bosnia, notably Kozarac and Prijedor. The people of the area vested in the Brigade their hopes for return, which had some of the characteristics of a popular movement, having been created by local people in exile in Croatia after the first wave of ethnic cleansing. Not until the Dayton Agreement ended the war, and at least nominally supported the right to return to former homes, did people eventually begin returning to Kozarac in the years after the end of the war. Initially, the Brigade was also the only group with the capacity to organise logistics, funding and representation to return to the town. For example, the Kozarac returnee community relied on the logistic centres that, during the war, had played a vital role in financing the military unit. Whilst in exile, refugee communities' monetary contributions, often organised around humanitarian concerts, maintained a bond with their original homes, and they shared a struggle to create conditions for return. These centres were instrumental in the development of networks of local associations - "grass roots" movements for social change - that created the social capital needed to rebuild their communities from exile. Improvements in transport and communications, such as through the student radio station in Ljubljana, or through online social networks, made it possible for migrants to keep their links with both their original home and their current residence, creating multiple attachments and bringing about the growth of transnational communities (Castles, 2003). They also developed social capital, understood as the maintenance of emotional bonds, mutual trust and solidarity (Stefanovic & Neophytos, 2011) and the development of new forms of social relatedness (Carsten, 1995) that created the conditions for sustainable return - what

returnees called the “survival of the community,” and something no UN agency could offer (Stefanovic & Loizides, 2011, Pickering, 2007).⁵⁶

Studies on forced migration, broadly speaking, have identified a number of factors in evaluating dilemmas of return. First of all, the issue of safety, including the presence of an International force, resistance of local government to accommodate returnees, the structure of local police forces, whether consisting of one or mixed ethnic groups, and the presence of war criminals in the socio-political environment. Second, the material incentives, such as where some countries offer financial assistance in encouraging return and the rebuilding of homes, or offer early retirement to those reaching that stage of their life. But the idea of return is important too. Political elites often encourage return as a way to reclaim territory or to return **of** their own ethnic group to their original home in order to change the demographic landscape of a place.⁵⁷ Thus, many view contact between various social or ethnic groups as an essential ingredient in combating the prejudices that were so decisive in unleashing violence.

From the evidence here, I would add another factor equally important for a success of return: timing. As described here, the Bosniak refugees in exile, or soldiers in Central Bosnia, never fully “accepted” the reality that they were no longer able to reclaim their home. This is important to recognise, as the activities in exile focused their “emotional citizenship” on Bosnia rather than their place of residence. Dreams of homecoming were encouraged and believed in such a way that four or five years of exile, during the war, cannot be accounted as a time of settling in another country. On the other hand,

56 There are a number of anthropological studies that critically examine the way in which UN agencies dealing with issues of return and refugee resettlement often neglect the long term vision of how the most vulnerable are to be accommodated. Needless to say, wars bring about a complete change of social and political structures of society, and therefore many returnees find that home is not necessarily a safe place. Hammond’s insightful work with Eritrean refugees describes a struggle and life threatening conditions that home may encapsulate. On the other hand, she notices how many International agencies perceive them as “numbers” rather than human beings. In the Bosnian case, a growing body of scholarly work focuses on the Dayton Bosnia as a failed state that contributed to the political elite’s aim to keep the country dysfunctional, whilst transforming it into a system of patronage through rapid privatisation of the state’s assets. See, for example, report by *Soros Foundation*, (2001) “International Support Policies to See Countries - Lessons (Not) Learned in Bosnia and Herzegovina”. http://test.soros.org.ba/docs/eng_politike_medunarodne_podrske_zemljama_jugoistocne_evrope.pdf

57 See /CG reports “Rights-Based Municipal Assessment and Planning Project, Municipality of Prijedor”, Oct 2003-Feb 2004.

five years of exile nevertheless created a mythical representation of pre-war homes, although in many cases their homes were burned or completely demolished.

Detailed studies on the internal social organisation of refugees, and in particular those returning to their original home, are still relatively scarce despite the fact that the field of Transitional Justice, for example, speaks of the importance of understanding local social dynamics. Incorporating local actors in devising strategies for social and political reform in a post-conflict society is seen as one of the best ways of achieving social transformation. Some have recently claimed that we need to move from treating the various social groups as objects of internationally-imposed and tested projects and engage with them as informed subjects on issues pertaining to post-war reconstruction. But in local social dynamics, one often finds social relations that show the treatment of returnees as objects of inquiry, whilst the ethnic group in control is treated as a partner. As argued elsewhere, in a different way, these asymmetrical power relations between the dominant majority and minority groups in a given place - often itself a social transformation achieved recently through ethnic cleansing or violence - is only reinforced by international donors, media and to some extent researchers in the field.

The Dayton Peace Accords (DPA) brought the war to an end and cemented new territorial divisions that had been achieved during the ethnic cleansing of 1992-1995 (Bose, 2002). Two separate entities were created, the Serbian Republika Srpska (RS) and the Bosniak-Croat Federation. The willingness to finally put an end to the war reflected the reality on the ground, where Bosnian and Croatian armies appeared to be threatening the very existence of the Serbian Republic in the summer of 1995. From the recently revealed war transcripts of former Serbian President Milosevic's government discussions with the Bosnian Serb leadership, we can deduce that Milosevic was ready to sign the agreement and was already aware that Bosnian Serbs could not keep the territory they had forcibly taken in the first phase of the cleansing without relying on the help of the JNA.⁵⁸

58 In published transcripts of his government discussion with the Bosnian Serb leadership, Milosevic notes that Bosnian Serbs got more than they expected from Bosnia in a territorial sense, and that they should look for a political, peaceful negotiation in order to legalise their territorial achievements. See recent transcripts in the newspapers *E-Novine*, Feljton, "Strogo cuvana tajna: Ratne sednice Vrhovnog saveta odbrane". 2011. <http://www.e-novine.com/feljton/51578-Perii-panici-Bosanski-Srbi-pred-porazom.html>

Apart from stopping the fighting and separating the forces, the DPA enshrined the right of return in Annex 7 of the Agreement (ICG, 1997). In the early years of Dayton Bosnia, return was indeed a preoccupation of UN agencies and international networks that poured into the country whilst NATO ground troops (IFOR) were deployed to guarantee their safety. But initially, NATO commanders did not want to get involved with such contentious issues, and preferred to just keep the peace and provide security. Sporadic, individual attempts to visit homes were faced with open hostility and sometimes violence (ICG, 1997). In fact, some members of NATO and the staff of the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) regarded refugees as a potential threat to the locals, due to their suffering possibly provoking revenge.⁵⁹ Others prevented return on the basis that safety took priority over enforcing the provisions of the DPA (Roane, 1996). I recall going to Banja Luka, the administrative centre of RS, in March 1996. At the time, Bosniaks were not welcome in the Serbian entity. I was acting as an interpreter for an Evening Standard journalist and was hidden in the back of an IFOR jeep as we passed Prijedor and Kozarac, observing fields of ruined houses en route to Banja Luka. During an interview with a British commander stationed in Banja Luka, it was clear they were making a conscious decision not to delve into “the past” of the conflict, as they saw it. They were here to protect civilians, but unfortunately for me, this did not extend to providing a lift back out of the RS, since he claimed that it was a safe environment to use public transport. Eventually, after a few days hiding in the flat of an international policeman, I hitched a lift from a British engineer’s IFOR vehicle to return to Sanski Most.

Spontaneous Return 1996-1999

In 1996, a “spontaneous minority return” that began, as it was called by foreign agencies, was in fact a well organised endeavour of several refugee associations and individuals in many parts of Bosnia (Stefanovic & Loizides, 2011). In the case of

⁵⁹ In an interview with the high representative of OSCE in Banja Luka, Ronald Dreyer, the journalist of the returnee’s newspaper and a veteran of the 17th, *Prijedorsko Ogledalo*, Edin Ramulic noted how hard it is to find a compromise without the international community’s assistance with regard to implementation of Dayton’s policy of return. Dreyer responded by saying: “For every problem there is a way to resolve it. On the one hand, people [Serbs] here have to accept people who will come back, and people [Bosniaks] returning, will they retaliate or not? From an article, “Isti izbori drugo pakovanje”, in *Prijedorsko Ogledalo*, April the 7th, 1997, br.7.

Prijedor, women's associations, in particular, played a crucial role in gathering large numbers of people willing to visit their former homes. They attempted to enter the city on several occasions before they were officially allowed in, which was regarded as a brave endeavour at a time when no one dared to return.⁶⁰ Organisational support came largely from individuals who had commanded the 17th Krajina Brigade. Sead Cirkin, a former Yugoslav Army officer and later a commander of the 17th Krajina Brigade, was one of the key individuals in the struggle for the right to return during and immediately after the war.



The destroyed minaret in Kevljani

⁶⁰ Interview with Sead Cirkin, a former commander of 17Kb, conducted in the summer of 2008. He recalls how "our women and foreigners were inspiration to us all. They had courage when no one dared".

**Bosnia-Herzegovina Housing requirements by municipality
for on-going minority returns for the year 2001**

Source: UNHCR, June 2001

Kozarac: Contested Return

Everything we wanted, we got ⁶¹

In the months leading to the attack on Kozarac, May 1992, Sead Cirkin, a Bosniak former JNA officer, was training members of the Kozarac Territorial Defence (TO) and other volunteers on the hills above the town. They had dozens of guns and were determined to defend their homes if attacked. Nearly two decades later, on the anniversary of the attack, Cirkin spoke of how they found themselves in an impossible situation, as it was clear within two hours of JNA shelling that they had no chance at all. In the spring of 1992, the JNA army had encircled their military base on Mount Kozara. As soon as the bombardment and shelling began, many threw their guns away and ran to join the rest of their families to be taken to the camps. Others attempted to escape across the mountain to Croatia. Cirkin was captured and, in contrast to many of his fellow volunteers, was brought to court in Banja Luka and charged for “armed rebellion against the legal Serb authority in Prijedor” (Hodzic, 1997:13). His brother was taken to Omarska camp and killed, whilst his imprisonment began in Keraterm and Manjaca, before being exchanged on Mount Vlasic in August 1993 by soldiers of the 17th Krajina Brigade. He joined the brigade as a soldier; but by the time of the march to Bosnian Krajina, he was commander of the brigade and in charge of a unit that was only seven kilometres from Omarska in 1995, when he was finally ordered to halt the offensive.

I have known Sead for a few years. Our first meeting was back in 2003, when I was doing field research about the brigade and its history. At the time, he was quite reluctant to share his war-time experiences as a leader of the return. Instead, he became a farmer, immersed in his daily life of tending to his cattle and enthusiastically talking about his future as a small but self-sufficient business, providing for his family and his community. He was intent on leaving politics for good, although his withdrawal from public life was a surprise to many returnees, who looked to him for leadership. I met him again during my fieldwork in 2007, however, this time I was living next to his farm and we got to know each other and he became much more accommodating. I was struck by his “unburdened past” attitude every time I met him. He spoke concisely when

61 In conversation with Sead Cirkin, 13 April 2008

discussing past strategies for return, often reiterating that the goals they set out had been achieved.⁶² At present, he continues to live the quiet life of a farmer in his home in Kozarusa, a village on a hill, a few miles away from Kozarac.

Cirkin's contribution to return is not widely known. His struggle as a member of the local municipal assembly in negotiating return is only remembered by some former soldiers and members of his negotiating team. In post-war Bosnia, scholars and the media have focused mostly on women's organisations, partly as a source of testimony, and have not focused as much on the former soldiers who made return possible.⁶³ Although this thesis is predominantly focused on the experiences and challenges of the post-return Kozarac community, it is not a story of victimhood, but rather one of discovered agency, human resilience and perseverance; and in that vein, the period of transition that saw the 17th Brigade put down their weapons and take up the logistical and political organisation of return illustrates this very well indeed. As we have seen, the Brigade stood out from the rest of the Bosnian army in several ways: they were steadfastly multi-ethnic, even during the dark days of the Bosniak-Croat war in Central Bosnia; they were highly disciplined; and, they fought across the country, rather than just for their own area. But they were also almost entirely self-reliant and self-sufficient, with a network of funders and supporters in the diaspora working as part of the unit to supply uniforms and equipment. This background meant that they took it for granted that they could only rely on themselves to organise return, rather than the Bosnian government or international agencies.

As a leader of the "war presidency of Prijedor" and the associations for return in the early days of negotiating return, Cirkin met with the local Serb authority to discuss

62 In Kozarac, it is a rarity to hear an inhabitant discussing social or cultural activities, let alone attempting to contribute in the development of those in a town saturated by cafes. I met Cirkin by chance in May 2011, and was intrigued with his plan of creating a music school for the Kozarac primary school children. He joked about taking *Srcem do Mira's* beautiful old Austro-Hungarian building, which used to be a nursery and primary school. This was not the conventional talk of all possible obstacles that the Serb authority might create, but rather a clear vision of how to achieve it with emphasis on the only guarantee of success being to approach directly relevant institutions. In his words, "we have the state's and the entity's institutions and we need to learn to deal with them". As a first step, then, he organised a meeting in a cafe where we met with the politicians who lobbied the relevant institutions in getting permission for the school.

63 I vividly remember a day in the summer of 2007 when a local women's NGO received an email from a journalist at CNN, requesting three women victims that suffered rape in Omarska camp. The email contained specific characteristics they were looking for to use in their reportage on the war crimes in the region.

“*sloboda kretanja*” (freedom of movement). He recalls that the meeting was intense, but his approach was to show a degree of an understanding on the basis that both sides had suffered loss, albeit in a very different context, during the war:

After the war, a tremendous tension. We held bombs in our pockets, facing one another. I tried to understand where they coming from first, to put myself into their shoes. So, for example, I was aware of the fact that although they killed our people, on the other hand, they have lost theirs too in the battlefields.⁶⁴

These initial meetings, hosted by UNHCR, between the Bosnian representatives of returnee associations and the Serb local authority of Prijedor were intended to probe the possibility of return. During the first official meeting in Prijedor, on September 5th 1996, the Bosnian delegation with Sead Cirkin entered their town for the very first time since they were ethnically cleansed in 1992. Cirkin was struck by the depletion of the old part of town where the wealthy and prominent Bosniak community had lived. Only one old-style Bosnian house survived as a cafe, whilst the rest of the land had become a farmers' market. In the meeting with the Serb authority, he explained that, for them, freedom of movement was a first step towards return. Stressing that the Bosniaks would not accept just a one-off tour to their destroyed villages and occupied flats in town: "We do not accept the visit to Brdo, Hambarine, Kozarac or any part of our municipality as a single trip, but we request and ask that each such visit is in the service of our return." Meanwhile, the war-time mayor of Prijedor, Milomir Stakic, who had been re-elected in March 1996, was identified by a Human Rights Watch report on Prijedor as a war criminal who was enjoying the financial benefits arising from the local authority's role in ethnic cleansing.

From May 1996 onwards, several attempts were made by refugees and IDPs, supported by foreign peace groups to step into the territory of RS; it resulted in them suffering violence and having to turn back before the entrance to Prijedor. Aside from the obvious obstruction by the Prijedor local authorities and their nationalist supporters, there was also a feeling that international agencies in charge of overseeing return were unwilling or lacking the capacity to fully support the process (Cox, 1998, Doyle&Sambanis, 2006). When a bus line between Prijedor and Sanski Most was established, providing

64 In conversation with Sead Cirkin, Fieldnote, April, 13. 2008

transport for refugees on both sides once a day, UNHCR brought a mini-van to Sanski Most, as they were not expecting a large number of returnees to willingly putting themselves at risk. However, a long line of people showed their determination to begin the process of return. In December 1996, refugees visited their homes in the village of Alici - a Prijedor suburb - and discovered that the last dozen houses that remained throughout the war had been recently burnt to the ground. The refugees stood quietly crying, whilst Serb policemen guarding the site smiled. UNHCR claimed the local Serb government was responsible for the arson, as the staff of UNHCR had given a list of names of those wishing to visit their homes to the local authority prior to the visit (Ito, 2001, Hodzic, 1996).

In the last pre-war population census of Prijedor, of 112,543 inhabitants, Muslims made 49,351, Serbs 47,581 and Croats 6,316 people. But by 1993, the Serb local authority's commission for providing a survey of population, claimed that Prijedor's community was 9.3% Muslim and 81.5% Serb; by 1997, they claim only 1.4% of the population were Muslims (Tabeau, 2009). Once it became clear that implementing Dayton's Annex 7 might actually happen, the main Serb nationalist party (SDS) began a pre election campaign based on the idea that "we succeeded, and we are continuing" (*uspjeli smo nastavljamo*). The rhetoric of 'we cannot live together' and the dissemination of fear were used by local media to amass large numbers of citizens opposed to return, whilst calling for Serb refugees to remain in the RS⁶⁵ and not return to their original homes (O'Connor, 1996). In one article entitled "Refugees on test", for example, the journalist advises Serb refugees from Croatia and internally displaced persons that they ought to appeal to relevant parties to assist them in their wish not to return to their original homes, but rather to ask for compensation in the form of property located in the other entity to demonstrate their "patriotic and constitutional awareness, and their will to preserve and defend Republika Srpska". On the Bosniak side, the refugees temporarily based in Sanski Most registered to vote at their original homes in Prijedor. However, the largest body of the electorate was in diaspora communities across the globe. The former logistic centres were mobilised to register this population. In the first two elections, Bosniak members of the assembly won ten seats more than the Serb party, SDS. But the

65 Krajina war leader Martinovic, for example, was personally in charge of bringing more Serb refugees to populate Kozarac in order to stop its indigenous population returning.

SDS joined a coalition with other Serb parties to control the municipality decision-making process and local institutions, leaving the Bosniak representatives powerless.

War crimes, fear and delay

In the early days of return, many in Sanski Most felt that return to Kozarac and Prijedor would follow in a matter of months, so no one considered Sanski Most as home: “Why would I plough the fields, in a month’s time I will be in my home” (Hodzic, 1998:4). But whilst the return required by the Dayton accords continued to be bogged down in negotiations between Serb and Bosniak politicians well into the second year after the end of war, a socio-psychological dimension came into play among those in Sanski Most. By the beginning of 1998, many were cultivating land and buying properties in Sanski Most. With the depletion of enthusiasm for return⁶⁶, other factors such as delayed fear, or a memory of suffering in the camps, or indeed concern whether one ought to bring up young children in this environment began to knock their confidence. Some have argued that the arrest of war criminals in Prijedor in the summer of 1997, and the shooting of Simo Drljaca, Prijedor’s chief of police, who was responsible for overseeing many of the crimes committed in the camps, encouraged minority return (Phuong, 2004:187). But my findings show that although potential returnees’ first reactions were indeed relief after the arrest, as it gave them hope that return would follow, their experience of the camps and lack of intervention by the international community during the war made them suspicious and cautious.⁶⁷

They also hoped that all the alleged war criminals on The Hague’s Prijedor list would be arrested and charged, which was seen as a key signal that the international community was committed to a new start for the returnees, and for the Serbs, the beginning of a process of reckoning. In reality, the arrest of Milan Kovacevic, a local doctor implicated in the crimes at Omarska and the take-over of Prijedor, just strengthened the perception of the Serb public that their heroes were being taken away just because they defended

66 At the time, the main understanding, among ordinary people, why they experienced obstruction to return was the Serb nationalist resistance, the international agencies lack of interest, and as frustrations grew, local Bosniak politics and internal factions.

67 On radio Prijedor, based in Sanski Most, opinions of ordinary people were transmitted. Some asked “does this really mean we are allowed to return now?”, Others expressed ambivalence as some feared that this would only mean hostility from the Serb neighbours.

their people - a narrative that continues today despite twenty Prijedor citizens having been charged at The Hague.⁶⁸ Some Serbs claimed at the time that no camps ever existed, and that Bosniaks left home in search of a better life in the West or moved to Sarajevo, as outlined by John Ostojic, for example, in his legal defence of Milomir Stakic at The Hague. A good example of the way in which local Serbs used this narrative in a rather threatening way comes from comments added to an article in the returnee's newspaper, responding to an article on fear. The article talked about the panic in Prijedor caused by the arrest of Stakic, and a Serb commentator responded that the Bosniaks ought to be the most intimate with fear, reminding them of the reason why their return was not possible:

It is true that there were some expulsions of unwanted faces [Non-Serbs] and people who for whatever reasons left the town, but that is only a small number. It is true that many people (Serbs) have moved in from Sanski Most, Petrovca, Bihac, etc and from Knin [Croatia]. Most of the latter reside in Kozarac now. Rebuilding is going slow, primarily because most "objects" (houses) had to be burnt down because of low quality build or because they were abandoned....Returnees are lecturing on fear but, I believe, they are most familiar with it....So, the return of those people [Bosniak returnees] is a problem due to lack of housing. However, we could solve that problem by putting them in temporary centres of Keraterm, then Trnopolje and Omarska, until we find a final solution"...and with regard to fear, come back if you are not SCARED. (Prijedorsko Ogledalo, 1997:9)

The expression of active denial of war crimes and ethnic cleansing began to move into the realm of public memory as local authorities erected memorials to celebrate Serbian soldiers who gave their life for the fatherland (*otadžbina*). Several of these were constructed whilst the debate about return continued, leading Bosniak refugees and IDPs to conclude they were part of a campaign to intimidate them (Ramulic, 2001:2). One such monument is the large concrete eagle statue erected in front of the former camp of Trnopolje. Others include those built in public spaces around the school centre and local government institutions, such as the wall of the dead at Mittal Steel company's office in Prijedor.

68 Illustrated in the *Kozarski Vjesnik* articles. As a result of the arrest of Dusko Tadic, for example, on 12 May, 1997, the government in Banja Luka chose Prijedor to host a public procession of the RS Army (VRS) and Pero Colic, commander of VRS, announced: "the Army will be a factor in stopping the return of Bosniaks and Croats back to their homes in the area of the Serbian entity". in *Prijedorsko Ogledalo*, July 1997



Serbian monument to 'fallen soldiers' outside the site of Trnopolje camp

The Role of *Srcem do Mira*

“The only guarantee for return is ourselves, our desire and our strength”

In May 1996, as we have seen, Bosnian IDPs and refugees in Sanski Most made several attempts to visit their homes, but were faced with violence or stopped by the Serb police.⁶⁹ At the same time, a local women’s organisation called *Srcem do Mira* (Through Hearts to Peace), led by a Kozarac woman, Emsuda Mujagic, in association with a British women’s group, organised a busload of women⁷⁰ eager to visit their homes in Kozarac. Their bus was attacked on the entrance to Prijedor, where a couple of hundred Serb residents threw stones at them and verbal insults.⁷¹ They were forced to return after two women were lightly injured and a NATO observation post was attacked⁷². At the time, many Serbs perceived Dayton’s return policy and freedom of movement as nominal, whilst the new entity borders were seen as real: "I don't care what the Dayton agreement says. It's just a piece of paper. The border is real."⁷³

Srcem do Mira has been one of the principal NGOs in the region since that time, and a key focal point for return. The group originated in Zagreb, Croatia, when the first wave of women refugees arrived from Bosnia. In late 1992, fifty women, victims of rape or incarceration, formed a Bosnian women’s organisation. They offered help in accommodating women, three large shelter homes were established for victims of rape,

69 In the Spring 1996, Drljaca organised violent responses to any attempt by non-Serbs to return. it continued during the September elections, when Bosniaks crossing the IEBL "were in fact prohibited from entering their home towns at all" in *Human Rights Watch*, "The Unindicted: Reaping the Rewards of Ethnic Cleansing in Prijedor", January, 1997. p4.

70 It is often noted, by scholars and those who resist the return of their former neighbours, that the elderly and women are the most favoured social group to be allowed to return, as they don't imply a threat or ability to challenge the status quo. Indeed, the logic of allowing elderlies to return rests on the fact that they want to spend their last years in familiar surroundings before dying, and women are seen as generally apolitical. In fact, the Bosnian war has shown that women were instrumental in diffusing ethnic tensions, encouraging cross cooperation and actively supporting the right to return. See Elissa Helms, 2003, "Women as agents of ethnic reconciliation? Women's NGO and international intervention in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina" in *Women's Studies International Forum*, (26)1. p 15-33. 2003

71 The Serb mayor, Milomir Stakic reported that: "A visit by seven or eight buses, four hundred people, a third of whom are extremists whose names alone irritate the citizens...would lead to an incident". Interview, 'Sadako Ogata – UN High Commissioner for Refugees', 20 May 1996. Transcript at www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/bosnia/ogata_5-20.html.)

72 <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/05/28/world/bosnia-serbs-again-block-entry-by-muslims.html> Serbian news agencies reported the event claiming that international officials tried to "smuggle in" the Muslims.

73 Ibid. Roane (1996) describes several attempts by Bosnian Muslims to visit their homes and cemeteries in Ramadan. Escorted by NATO troops in Doboij, for example, several people ran into a minefield due to local Serb attacks.

in particular for those who had become pregnant as a result. Counselling services were provided and various social gatherings encouraged as a way of coping with their experiences. They also began recording testimonies that were later used at the Hague Tribunal.⁷⁴ Emsuda Mujagic was in her late thirties with two young children when she was taken to Trnopolje camp. She managed to reach Croatia via Central Bosnia after being released, and my first encounter with her was in 2005, in central London, when we met to discuss the process of setting up a memorial to the Omarska camp. My immediate impression was that she was a dedicated woman, and her role in *Srcem do Mira*, a decade or more after its formation, gave her an aura of self-confidence and self-reliance.

She returned to Sanski Most with her husband in order to help with the process of return. By 1998, *Srcem do Mira* had developed close working relationships with international women's networks, such as the Hazelwood women with whom she travelled to conferences around the world. The Hazelwood women were active throughout the war, and developed a ritual of planting a tree in a different "dark sites" of the conflict zone, and when they met Emsuda in Zagreb in 1993, they resolved to plant a tree every year in Kozarac despite the difficulties of getting there during the war. This ritual then expanded to become an annual conference in Kozarac, which has become something of a local tradition for the returnee community. In 1994 and 1995, they held their conference in Sarajevo, at a time when getting in and out of the city with a large group of middle-aged and older women was highly risky indeed. When their bus drivers abandoned their vehicles, they continued on foot, into the city. The Hazelwood women also brought various groups of Bosnian youngsters to the UK for a break from the war in their wonderful, large estates in Devon and France. Their long-term support for Emsuda and *Srcem do Mira* has been of genuine assistance to Kozarac in developing capacity, confidence and connections to support the difficult process of re-establishing the community.

Emsuda's NGO, and also *Izvor*, a Prijedor women's association that was formed in Sanski Most prior to return, both took a lead in organising various projects to help

⁷⁴ See "Calling the Ghosts", documentary, 1996. in which Jadranka Cigelj talks about her decision to record the plight of the women.

women stay socially active and self-sufficient whilst they were in limbo, waiting for return. Through foreign donations, they acquired sewing machines to set up a small clothes factory, and a training centre for hairdressing. They organised care for elderly people at home and medical support for poor families who could not afford travel and medical expenses, and supported children's schooling and material expenses. When return began, these two organisations would eventually move to Kozarac and Prijedor to continue their work. At the crucial time when return was being negotiated, *Srcem do Mira* played an important role in amassing families and maintaining their motivation to return when the situation looked especially bleak at the beginning of 1998. They organised social gatherings to discuss fear and common concerns about how people would be able to support life in a region that clearly did not want them, and with no clear economic prospects. By sharing and giving voice to these anxieties, they were able to find common solutions, such as the creation of a mobile kitchen in Kozarac for those who were spending their weekends in clearing away house rubble and overgrown vegetation. Years later, many returnees would recall with nostalgia this time when a pre-war sense of communal life still existed, albeit in a rather fragmented form.

Some anthropologists, such as Elisa Helms, have looked at the role of women's NGOs in Bosnia, and analysed gender relations in the post-war socio-political environment (Helms, 2003). Helms described elements of a patriarchal tradition, but also noticed how women negotiated this landscape by embracing their womanhood, and even manipulating it to play an active part in all forms of public life. However, they were always explicit that their organisations were not political, despite a range of activities that might suggest otherwise. *Srcem do Mira* sees the focus of its work with women to be focused on raising awareness of their human rights, educating them in schooling their children and providing assistance for medical needs. This narrative was encouraged by foreign donors, who were keen to finance projects for "women's emancipation" as part of their work in the region. During my fieldwork, I witnessed numerous examples of organisations attempting to "bring democracy and freedom" to Bosnian women, but few were even aware of the long tradition of women's contribution to culture, literature and political participation in Yugoslavia, from the key role they played in the anti-fascist Partizan's movement during the Second World War, through to

the leading role they played in all sides during the recent war.⁷⁵ *Srcem do Mira* was very much part of this tradition, rather than an entity created by international donors.

In 1998, *Srcem do Mira* made contact with Serb NGOs in Prijedor to organise a conference to discuss refugee return on both sides. After the conference, entitled Building Peace and Return,⁷⁶ where it was obvious that most refugees on both sides were eager to return to their original homes, a party was held where people got together to drink and dance just like the old pre-war days.⁷⁷ It was anticipated that cooperation between these NGOs would support the return process, but after NATO bombed Belgrade in 1999, local Prijedor NGOs declined to participate in *Srcem do Mira*'s annual conference, and claimed that holding a conference on 30th May was an insult to them as, on that day in 1992, a small group of Prijedor Muslims had attacked the town in a futile attempt to retake it. They also claimed that Emsuda had decided the themes of the conference without consulting them and they were only invited at the last minute. Despite this setback, Emsuda's organisation contributed a great deal to the re-establishment of life in the early days of Kozarac's reconstruction, for example by reclaiming the primary school, which had been taken over by Serb families, so that they could educate the children of returnees (Sivac-Bryant, 2008).

With such a plethora of bottom-up, locally organised activities pushing for return, the international agencies were forced to take a decision about how they would support the process. The British IFOR contingent in the region stepped up the arrest of indicted war criminals in the summer of 1997, taking a more active stance after the May 1997 Peace

75 See the story of "mama", a young Kozarac woman who joined the 17kb, participating in the battlefields and caring for the injured soldiers when was needed. They called her mama, understood as the highest accolade one can hold. She died in 2007 at home in Kozarac due to injuries suffered in the war. A soldier once told me the story of a group of women with exceptional skills and bravery during the attack on a frontline in Central Bosnia, asserting that due to their calmness and fearlessness in contrast to some male soldiers, if war happens again, he would only join in a women's brigade. On the contribution to the Partizan's movement and post Second World War, see for example autobiographical work of a Croatian writer Eva Grlic, *Sjecanja*, Duriex, Zagreb, 1997.

76 Some scholars have argued that the lack of presence of international agencies at this gathering of over four hundred participants only reinforced the perception that they were not interested in the processes of return. Belloni (2005) claims that the UNHCR did not attend this conference showing a lack of interest towards local initiatives. See "Peacebuilding at the local level: Refugee return in Prijedor", *International Peacekeeping*, (12)3, Autumn 2005. p8.

77 See Peter Lippman's detailed reports on the conference and his trips to Kozarac during 1998 and 1999. at www.advocaynet.org

Implementation Council meeting in Sintra, Portugal, which endorsed a more vigorous approach in the implementation of the DPA (Belloni, 2005). International agencies declared 1998 the “year of minority return,” and to entice local authorities to support return, large sums of money were offered for rebuilding infrastructure. As a result, fifteen towns were declared “open cities” (UNHCR, 1997), but Prijedor was not part of this due to the US Congress embargo on aid to places suspected of harbouring war criminals (Chandler, 2005). However, after realising that return was imminent, and that it could lead to aid and investment, Prijedor’s obstruction to return began to recede. Their plan was to allow a certain amount of returnees back into the municipality as long as they kept to certain remote villages. So for example, they allocated Dera, a small hamlet deep in the forests of Mount Kozara and Kevljani, a village on the outskirts of Kozarac, bordering Omarska village.⁷⁸ Most Kozarac returnees were unwilling to accept such a proposal. But Sead Cirkin decided to accept it. He believed that once return began there would be no way to stop people returning to their original homes. It had been rumoured that Cirkin had a plan in 1996 to gather twenty thousand temporarily accommodated refugees in Sanski Most to march into Kozarac and set up tents until the international observers took them seriously, and the official of ECMM claimed the Serb authorities were concerned that Cirkin might smuggle his soldiers into the region under cover of return and instigate a new conflict.

In reality, return was smaller and slower than that⁷⁹. 1999 became the year of return on a practical level; only Cirkin and around twenty former soldiers and respected community figures returned in 1998. The idea was if the leadership returned, people would feel safe to follow. Another more pressing issue was the issue of hundreds of Serb refugees from Knin, in Croatia, who were living in the primary school building in the centre of Kozarac with their commanders and soldiers who had fled when Croatia re-took its

78 Minority return was eventually tolerated but in a small numbers and rural villages without economic or strategic importance to dissuade the development of a powerful community. See Marcus Cox, (1998) “Strategic Approaches to International Intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina” *Centre for Applied Studies in International Negotiations*.

79 No census has been conducted since 1991. Demographic statements have been estimates since the changes brought about by war. A census was planned for 2011 but authorities could not reach an agreement. Bosniak politicians feared that the new census would further legitimise the results of ethnic cleansing, whilst Serb nationalists were eager to prove the homogenous nature of their RS. In 2002, it was estimated that in Prijedor, 20% of the non-Serb population have returned (Wesseling, 2005:91). Recently, the local authority of Prijedor claimed that in total there were 24,997 returnees, of which Kozarac had 11,938. See “Strateski plan: dobre uprave u oblasti voda i zastite zivotne sredine Opstina Prijedor 2008-2013” at <http://www.opstinaprijedor.org>

occupied territories. The early returnees restored several Bosniak cafes to kick-start social life in the area. But the issue of which areas the municipality would allow to be re-settled remained. There was a case of an elderly man who refused to continue past his house on the way to the designated place of return, so he stopped and began clearing the rubble that used to be his dwelling, when local Serb refugees arrived with the Prijedor police⁸⁰ who told him to leave. By that time, Cirkin had called UNHCR and IFOR to the site and the man explained “that was his home and that the cafe next to his house is also his property but he was alright for the Serb to use it for now”⁸¹. The international agencies heard essentially a story of a man in danger of being driven from his house for a second time, and decided that could not be allowed, thus validating Cirkin’s hypothesis about the unstoppable nature of return once it had begun.

As a result, Kozarac became the first site of significant return from the Federation to RS. By 1999, there were 10,000 returnees living in the area, and the following year saw the first Mosque to be re-built in the town in the whole of RS. The lack of housing was a major problem in the early days, but returnees organised “*satorska naselja*” (tent villages) in the face of opposition from both the Serb authority and OSCE representatives in case they were perceived by the local Serb population as intimidating. Nonetheless, the Kozarac return initiative, which was almost entirely the result of self-organisation among the local population, convinced international agencies to create a Reconstruction and Return Task Force⁸², whose mandate was literally to follow the flow of displaced persons and to offer protection using the peacekeeping force, SFOR.

80 The police was staffed with men who played a role in the ethnic cleansing of non-Serbs from Prijedor. In 1996, an American journalist identified four indicted war criminals in the force. See Neuffer, *The Key to My Neighbour’s House: Seeking Justice in Bosnia and Rwanda*, Picador, 2002. Also, ICG report “Going Nowhere Fast”, 1997.

81 Fieldnotes, April, 2008.

82 Belloni (2005) argued that “The RRTF’s main innovation was the decision that international activities should follow the flow of DPs, instead of requiring DPs to follow the flow of international activities.” p.9.



A cafe in Kozarac

Online community as a network bridge

The challenge of rebuilding the town once return had begun was immense, and has required a great deal of support from the diaspora community, who stay closely involved in local events. Many diaspora members visit the town every summer to stay connected with their former homes, and also to support those who live in Kozarac all year round. But the most effective way of staying in touch all year round has proven to be the online forum at Kozarac.ba,⁸³ which has been an important space in which the Kozarac community has continued to thrive, whilst returnees have been trying to re-establish a presence in the real-world town. It remains a locus for those concerned with the existential life of the town, both inside and outside Bosnia, and is a source of support for every aspect of community regeneration. It is also a fascinating case study in online community development, since it was the principal manifestation for several years of a community decimated and dispersed by ethnic cleansing, and it nurtured the identity of Kozarac until people were able to begin returning to the town. Still now, ideas and financial projects are developed on Kozarac.ba and then those “in the field” implement them. It is hard to separate the intertwined notions of ‘home’ and ‘field’ in this case. Is Kozarac.ba home, field or both? It reunites all those who are scattered around the world in their need to transcend physical distance and play an active role in the reconstruction of their community. On the emotional level, it had spawned some very interesting and very self-aware debates about victimhood, the struggle to come to terms with the past, and recently (since the International Court of Justice failed to convict Serbia for complicity in genocide) a need to share stories of those who were killed as a way of reclaiming their presence within the community. At the same time, narratives are constructed in such a way as to illustrate, through individual stories, the resilience and strength of communal life despite everything, reaffirming its continuation.

In a way, kozarac.ba is the only public sphere in which local people and those in exile are able freely to share and discuss their common goals in relation to re-establishing their presence in Republika Srpska. The anthropologist Victoria Bernal writes that we need to look at the “significance of violence and conflict in order to understand

⁸³ <http://www.kozarac.ba/>

community,” (Bernal, 2005:661) and in Kozarac this is at the heart of understanding how a community that was supposed to be destroyed is re-establishing itself in a hostile environment. In the early years of return, many outspoken returnees and survivors of Omarska were threatened and often interrogated by the same police that played a part in the ethnic cleansing. To some extent, this is still common - as recently as 2010, an outspoken member of the respected NGO Izvor reacted to a claim by the Bosniak president of the Prijedor assembly, Azra Pasalic, that returnees have a good and prosperous life in the region, and a policeman warned him to not disseminate such views or he will “suffer the consequences.”⁸⁴ This partly explains why Kozarac.ba has become such an important forum for open discussion, providing a protected space in which the process of community rebuilding can be debated.

Bernal, whose research deals primarily with the Eritrean diaspora in the USA and Europe, has conducted long-term investigations into the use of cyberspace for theorising transnationalism and raising questions concerning public spheres, notions of community, cultural production and the development of knowledge. Her analysis of the diaspora’s dehai.org website deals with the mobilisation of social action during the war, such as financial support, debates about the constitution, influence over politics in the country and how Eritreans who reside in the homeland have begun to use new tools of communication to bring an end to media censorship in the country. She is critical of the widely held view that “internet facilitates community building as a global village without borders” but asserts that when something important is at stake, the emerging technology can become a public sphere for a new public or a counterpublic, such as might be the case with a “community which is constructed out of violent process of conflict and exclusion” (Bernal, 2005: 662). Thus Bernal makes clear that perceiving and utilising the online as a public sphere should not be equated with the conventional exchange of information by other more traditional media communications:

What is powerful about the access opened up by cyberspace and by public spheres is the ways they allow diverse actors to call into question the terms of knowledge production, relations of authority, and the politics of representation and the ways they give rise to alternative knowledge and counterpublics. (Bernal, 2005:672)

⁸⁴ email correspondence, July, 2010

As Bernal has noticed, cyberspace does not create a borderless village or community, but what it does is help those who have experienced displacement, people in the diaspora or (as is the case with Kozarac) trying to recreate a community, and reconfigure their place of home and sense of belonging (Bernal, 2005, 2006).

This has certainly been the case with Kozarac.ba, which was established by Svabo, a veteran of 17th brigade and his friends in 2005 as a way of maintaining contact between those who had returned to the town and those who remained in the diaspora. It is a remarkable example of how online community can overcome structural damage to social networks in the “real” world. As Lee Bryant writes in a study of the site⁸⁵, it is also an interesting example of the phenomenon of ambient intimacy⁸⁶ as an affordance of online community - in other words, people inside the town and outside the country can co-exist in the same space and share apparently mundane, but emotionally important information, photographs and videos of day-to-day life of Kozarac. The biggest structural hole in the community’s social network results from the Serbs’ deliberate policy of *eliticide*, as the journalist Peter Maass (1996) wrote in Vanity Fair: *“This was eliticide, the systematic killing of a community’s political and economic leadership so that the community could not regenerate. At least 2,500 civilians were killed in Kozarac in a 72-hour period. It was a slaughterhouse”*.⁸⁷ In other words the very people whom the community would normally turn to for leadership and ideas were the first to be killed in 1992⁸⁸. The forum provided by Kozarac.ba is one way in which the community tries to fill this gap.

85 <http://www.headshift.com/our-blog/2008/10/26/solving-real-world-problems-th/>

86 <http://www.disambiguity.com/ambient-intimacy/>

87 http://www.petermaass.com/articles/bosnias_ground_zero/

88 A survivor of Omarska camp and a pre-war journalist, Hukanovic (1996), describes in his book *The Tenth Circle of Hell* witnessing horrific torture of his friends in the White House, who were once the intellectual community of Prijedor. In his doctoral thesis, Gratz (2007) claims that the term *eliticide* was first time used in 1992 by a British reporter, Nicholson M. Reporting from Bijeljina, a town in northeast Bosnia, Nicholson described the elimination of a dozen respected individuals in the town. A former Prijedor resident and journalist, Nedim Kadiric, who worked for local newspapers in 1991 and often reported about events in the local assembly sessions, reminded me of his observations on the tensions and hostilities among Prijedor politicians a year prior to the war. He felt fear at that time and decided to “run to Germany”. Unfortunately, as soon as Serb nationalists took Prijedor, his father was murdered. With Nedim’s help, we accounted for 55 intellectuals, doctors, professors, economists and intellectuals who were murdered (facebook chat, September 2011). A list of the intellectual, political and economical leadership is included at the end of bibliography.

The site has also played a more direct role in the economic development of the town, with potential projects or needs discussed among the community and then requests made for support, which are usually met through the diaspora network. A great example of this is the way the town re-established its historic fire service by discussing the need for it online, and then raising the money, before a member of the site went and bought fire engines in Germany and drove them to Kozarac. Whereas many online communities are whimsical and virtual, Kozarac.ba is driven by a need to positively impact on the real world of the town, which gives it both a relevance and urgency rarely seen in such forums.

Although it is clear to all concerned that those who wanted to return have already done so, most people have learned that the diaspora represents not only a financial backbone in re-building Kozarac, but also an “emotional citizenship” that is deeply intertwined with the destiny of the community at home (Bernal, 2006). As Bernal demonstrates, cyberspace gives an equal opportunity for ordinary people to participate in the production of their cultural, social or political endeavours relating to their identity, and we often see working class individuals without higher degrees hailed as important writers within the web site. However, in the case of Kozarac, intellectuals also play an important role. During the ethnic cleansing, the town’s intellectual elite was systematically eliminated and the new one resides largely in exile. Most returnees, who are actively engaged in creating their social and political space, demand from those in exile to contribute to their endeavour in some way. In consideration of all this, then, my study of re-making home for a community that suffered displacement could not be completed without a meaningful study of its online existence as well.

24h Live

I posted 52 photos on Facebook in the album "Ljetni, 2011" [Misi:///b...](#)

kozarac.ba

Pocetna Chat Forum Kontakt

Google Pretraživanje Traži

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		komentara	prečitana	Ocjene	Datum	Akcije
	Vijesti: Tamna strana "najmirnijih" zemalja svijeta	1	808	5	2007-07-26	
	Vijesti: Građani dobrovoljci u potrazi za dječakom	0	903	5	2007-07-26	
	Vijesti: Himna RS ne ustavna	0	551	5	2007-07-26	
	Kozarac...: KOZARAC-žutarnji traži...	18	5550	4.12	2007-07-22	
	Vijesti: Trepake vrućine do 24. jula	0	839	5	2007-07-21	
	Vijesti: Septembar rok za reformu policije u BiH	3	575	5	2007-07-19	
	Vijesti: Pronašli dječeve igračke, dječaka još nem	20	1756	5	2007-07-19	
	Kozarac...: Dan poslije K.O.R.E	15	3124	5	2007-07-15	
	Vijesti: Ukopano 465 identifikovanih Srebreničana	8	934	5	2007-07-11	
	Kozarac...: KOZARAC-žutarnji traži...	18	3964	4	2007-07-11	
	Obrnuto Od Zaborava: Neću ja hilif	7	1899	5	2007-07-10	
	Vijesti: Suspendovano 35 policajaca RS	5	864	4	2007-07-10	
	Vijesti: Sve spremno za komemoraciju	0	554	5	2007-07-10	
	Kozarac...: OPTIMISTI 2004 - 3 godine kasnije	10	1572	5	2007-07-09	
	Vijesti: Komšić preuzeo kormilo od Radmanovića	4	599	5	2007-07-07	
	P O Z I V	2	1013	5	2007-07-07	
	H A T M A - D O V E	0	555	5	2007-07-06	
	Kozarac...: Tužna obavijest	4	1009	5	2007-07-06	
	Islam: Džuma...	3	535	5	2007-07-06	
	Kozarac...: KOZARAC-žutarnji traži...	18	4299	4.77	2007-07-06	
	Obrnuto Od Zaborava: NAMESTAJ	26	2913	5	2007-07-05	
	osovina.org	0	523	5	2007-07-05	
	Kozarac...: Dženaza rahmetli Avdi Bilal	8	1108	5	2007-07-05	
	Kozarac...: Novo iz Katakomba	3	1813	5	2007-07-03	
	JAVNI POZIV	7	961	5	2007-07-02	
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Kozarac.ba news archive showing stories from July 2007

Chapter 3: Victimhood and the Politics of Remembering

In the first part of this thesis, I looked at the various ways in which individuals and the wider Kozarac community sought to re-establish themselves in the town after the war. In Kozarac, the initial phase of physically re-populating the town has been seen as a rare success story in post-war Bosnia, and has often been quoted by media and scholarly studies about return. Indeed, as Sead Cirkin said at the time: “we have achieved everything we asked for”. To some extent, then, the social and psychological dimensions of the war’s legacy were being dealt with, although up to 2005 it might be said that the focus was on unilateral attempts to deal with the past. Whilst Kozarac has indeed been rebuilt, it remains an unwanted Bosniak enclave within the entity of Republika Srpska, and estranged from the local authority of the municipality of Prijedor. Its inhabitants contend that they live in an island within RS, unacknowledged and, although allowed to occupy their original home, treated as second-class citizens⁸⁹. As return became permanent, some began to feel the division between the “two realities” was widening, and that it was necessary to begin “seeing” Prijedor as part of their world. After all, it is the seat of the local government, and only by reclaiming it as part of their own realm could there be a possibility for new relations within a wider social world to emerge. As during the war, territorial claims remain a key notion over which people contend their sense of ethno-national identity⁹⁰. But also, these demarcated places of communal life act as a safety net for minority groups who might feel vulnerable under the hegemony of an ethnic majority, especially since the distinction between groups is reflected in all socio-political structures of the region.

89 To emphasise the feelings of inequality and general discrimination among Bosniak returnees, some individuals point to Mayor Pavic being rewarded in 2006 for Prijedor’s treatment of its Roma people as an example of the town’s tolerance and respect towards minorities. They have no political power, and only a dozen Bosniaks are employed within the local authority offices. See Amnesty International’s report (2006) “Bosnia and Hercegovina. Behind Closed Gates: Ethnic Discrimination in Employment” at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR63/001/2006>; and, Tinjak, E (2003) “RS Police Continue to Intimidate the Bosniaks of Prijedor”, *Bosnia Report* 36, at http://www.bosnia.org.uk/bosrep/report_format.cfm?articleID=1026&reportid=162

90 The perception of boundaries of a group identity are so rigid and all-encompassing that shopping in “their” shops can compromise your patriotism or locally known “love for Kozarac”. An interesting debate on kozarac.ba symbolises the paradoxical nature of present day patriotism. Patriotism is perceived as the love for one’s home; however, those that shop in “Serb shops” contend that they are well aware that the “Bosniak shops” tend to put the price up as soon as the diaspora arrives, to get as much money as possible from them, claiming that such patriotism equates to individual material interest and has nothing to do with sense of belonging.

In the following chapter, I shall explore the politics of victimhood and memorial practices in the Kozarac community, and consider whether these processes are a necessary part of re-establishing a shattered community, or part of what Lovrenovic calls “prolonging an unfinished war” (Lovrenovic, 2010). Is coming to terms with the past on both an individual and collective level a necessary pre-requisite for reconciliation and sustainable co-existence, or does it stand in the way of getting on with a new post-war life? Should remembering the events of 1992 and grieving for the dead remain an act of private memory, or should it be front and centre of the public memory of the region if we are to deal with the recent past sufficiently to support meaningful co-existence in the future?

Specifically, in the case of Prijedor, apart from the families of the missing needing to find and bury their loved ones, the Bosniaks’ preoccupation with the dead and in particular those that have not been found is a way of keeping the recent past alive in the locale. As my interlocutor noted, “if we bury all our dead, the past will be buried with them, just as individuals in the diaspora are keen to lay to rest their murdered family members and move on”. The concern is that, given the Bosniaks eagerness to “forgive and forget”, the rituals regarding mass funerals are possibly helping those, on the other side, by burying the evidence of crimes they do not even acknowledge took place. As those crimes have never been publicly recognised, the perpetrators -Serb soldiers - are depicted in public memory as “fallen heroes” who sacrificed their lives for the foundation of the RS, as the erected monument on the site of a former camp of Trnopolje claims, for example. In a socio-political context where public anniversaries and days of remembering connote a “celebration of violence”⁹¹ as a way of giving freedom to “our” people, who may have suffered if “we had not reacted first”⁹², what happens to the real victims? How are they grappling with the deliberate rejection of their suffering in everyday life?

91 Last, M opines that “healing the social wounds of war has many forms, such as revenge and rituals of violence that purport to free the victim and the perpetrator.” In “Healing the Social Wounds of War”, *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, vol. 16 2000, p 370-382.

92 The Serb war victims groups in Prijedor argue that an incident where several civilians were wounded and two policemen killed in the Bosniak village of Hambarine just before the main expulsion and systematic murder of non-Serb began, proves that Serbs would have been exterminated if they did not act first. Furthermore, this line of argument, explains “the reason for the crimes apparently committed against the Prijedor’s non-Serb inhabitants is the reaction to this incident”.

In late 1980's Yugoslavia, the resurrection of a "collective memory" of Second World War atrocities, aided by TV images of unearthed mass graves filled with human remains, had a visceral effect on popular consciousness. These acts of re-burial helped mobilise nationalist forces, inflame inter-communal relations and arguably contributed indirectly to the murder and expulsion of former neighbours from 1991 onwards (Lovrenovic, 2010, Minow, 1999, Duizinjgs, 2007, Steger-Petrovic,,2009). Now, after the wars of the 1990's, something similar is happening in memory practice, where the victim is central to maintaining the power of the dominant political elites, but also crucial to the continuation of "psychological warfare" (Lovrenovic, 2010). The shaping of memory of those killed in the war is the most important vehicle in the homogenisation and amassing of a collective sense of belonging and victimhood. Coupled with the nationalists' rhetoric of fear, of the possibility of another war, or of neighbourly revenge, more than at any other time in the history of the contemporary Bosnia, her communities continue to foster and live in a culture of mistrust (*nepovjerenja*) with newly defined and imagined borders.

Thus, the instrumentalisation of victimhood⁹³ on all sides by the new class of political leaders illustrates that crimes committed in the war are detached from their specific historical context and also from the complexities and contradictions of historical events. Incidents of victimisation - "chosen trauma" - are the backbone of collective memory on which to build or define identity (Vamik 2001, Maier, 1993). As a result, like the victim, crimes (*zlocini*) committed by war criminals (*zlocinci*) have become sacralised by nationalists on all sides. War criminals, both in hiding and those serving sentences, have been perceived by respective communities as products of war rather than associated with the brutal crimes they committed; as such, they have received financial and other support from their nationalists and governments, such as funding for their lawyers, family support and in some cases help finding them a job within local institutions after they serve their sentence⁹⁴. Hence the rehabilitation of war criminals, in the local settings where their victims are still struggling to be recognised, and their lack of

93 Idith Zerta (2005)l in *Israel's Holocaust and the politics of nationhood*, writes eloquently about how the country's ideology appropriated Memory of the Holocaust in a way that erased the right to personal or family memory (but also the human side of suffering) for the collective ideology of a "memory without remembering".

94 The arrest of Ratko Mladic illuminates how the Military and individuals in power and religious leaders continue to hide and support those in hiding.

remorse due to the Hague Tribunal's policy of plea bargain if the criminal's apologies to the victims, have only deepened the sense of injustice on the part of the victims⁹⁵. The case of Srebrenica, where over eight thousand men and boys were murdered by the Bosnian Serb army in July 1995, is the only one that has received legal and ethical valorisation (Lovrenovic, 2010:187). Even then, the current president of RS, Milorad Dodik, continues to make a mockery of the genocide, claiming that it was not a genocide but rather a massacre that can be explained as Serb retaliation for Bosnian Army crimes committed in the early days of war in Serb villages around the town. However, despite the processing of war criminals, of which a disproportionately large number are from Prijedor, the Hague Tribunal has not had a positive or transformative effect on the local perception of truth and justice concerning the war (Stover, Shigekane, 2002)). In fact, on the local community level, it has only strengthened divisions and beliefs that it is partial to the Bosniaks as "there are hardly any Bosniaks on trial".

The presence of international agencies such as Office of the High Representative of the United Nations (OHR) - essentially a protectorate with an ill-defined role and ambivalence in the way it exercises its power - and international humanitarian organisations that intervene in most spheres of social life, have contributed to cementing a culture of dependency, and an almost juvenile mentality among national and local governors (Karic 2011, Lovrenovic 2010). Consequently, there is no clear definition of who is in charge of the country, but rather a picture of fragmented power structures that resemble the millet system of Ottoman Bosnia, where each community appears (and imagines) to rule themselves with no coherent overarching moral and political framework. In such a climate, war profiteers (*ratni profiteri*) and criminals (*zlocinci*) are the men in power guarding the legacy of war and status quo. Thus, ordinary people, after fifteen years of post-war political and social stagnation, are unable to imagine another "way of being". In fact, as Lovrenovic (2010) claims, the dysfunctionality of

⁹⁵ See for example, Drago Prcac's apology to the victims at the Hague Tribunal after making deal with the court. His clearly insincere apology was caught by the camera, as he was unable to even properly read the statement written by his lawyers. Similarly, several war criminals that have served their sentences and returned to Prijedor have, with regard to their conduct in the camp of Omarska, publicly stated that they would act the same if such an occasion presented itself again. On a national level, in the last couple of years, we have seen how those returning to Serbia after serving their sentence, have appeared on national television and claimed to have been innocent, despite their plea bargain during the trial. As a result, the victims are well aware that the court negotiation of the plea bargain has nothing to do with them and the perpetrator's genuine remorse, but rather the financing of the court and the perpetrator's wish to serve a minimum sentence.

the state has become the “modus of social life”. Nonetheless, there is no monopoly of power, as there are always individuals or groups who are able to turn their disadvantaged position into advantage, but those groups are still a small minority⁹⁶. As we shall see, the victims and their associations as a part of civil society, continue to be among the only social actors wanting social change.

Whether social transformation is possible with the nationalists’ firm grip over state institutions is not the topic of this thesis. But rather, my hope is to illustrate various tensions among social actors that relate to the failure of transitional justice mechanisms such as memorialisation, reconciliation projects, the Hague Tribunal’s trials, and so on, to help communities face the past. Transitional Justice and reconciliation endeavours in post-war Bosnian society are virtually non-existent, despite international donors funding various local and international agencies focusing on the implementation of peace building in post-conflict society. This is partly due to the fact that political transition has yet to happen in any meaningful sense, but also because practitioners have largely failed to consult or understand the local population⁹⁷. The nature of post-Dayton Bosnia is also a factor here, since a “particularised bargaining on the past” was achieved within a constitutional settlement in which The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was to prosecute the main war criminals, such as the founders of the Serbian entity, whilst at the same time giving legitimacy to its creation. This has increased resistance on the part of Serb citizens to face the crimes committed in the process of carving out the new entity of Republika Srpska, which they see as “the Serbian struggle to conquer the land for its people”. In such a political environment, and without the state’s honest examination of the recent past, civil society can only

96 Croatian author, Slavenka Drakulic, (2009) has argued that perhaps “the failed generation” of the 1950’s and 60s, living a comfortable life, able to travel to the West in contrast to other East European states that were under communism, had it too easy and the Yugoslav system of “socialism with a human face” only created an apathetic generation, cushioned in its lifestyle of east and west consumerism (buying goods and brands in Italy or cultural trips to London, for example) without ever producing a rebellious or radical movement against the system, as happened in Czechoslovakia and Poland. Hence, in the post-Yugoslav states, we see the legacy of socialism with a human face in the way that hard-core communists have simply become ultra nationalists.

97 It is important to note that contrary to most local populations, individuals from communities involved in various agencies seeking truth and justice have mostly praised the international “experts” and their advice with regard to dealing with a legacy of a violent past. On social networks such as facebook.com, one can find various national-international groups, particularly among Bosniaks and foreigners, who speak of their struggle to make the country face the past crimes.

illuminate the limitations of their quest for social justice on the one hand, whilst continuing to claim the international funds available to them in order to assuage widespread unemployment, on the other⁹⁸. Thus, local communities, albeit for different reasons, often claim that socio-economical activities might pave the way to the lasting social transformation and restoration of the victim's dignity and social justice.



Bosniak graves near Kozarac, Kamicani cemetery.

98 On the proliferation of NGO culture as employment agencies see the report of Social Inclusion Foundation (2010) .

On Loss: “As If They Were Present”

In those last days in Omarska, I remember, we were all sitting and waiting for our names to be called out. Some days later Omarska was going to be closed, although we did not know it yet. We did feel that something important was happening. A guard was reading the list of names... Long lists, day after day...As he was reading, I heard many names that were not among us anymore, and realised that he was not even aware that they'd murdered them. It was as if these people were still present, although they did not respond. At that point, I knew and felt an enormous loss of life. I realised then, for the first time, that they will never come back... (survivor, Satko Mujagic, 2007 ⁹⁹)

The nightmares on the brain of the living lies in this paradox of the (dead)'s presence and absence. (Gilsenan 1994)

This chapter examines the ways in which those who have survived manage their memories and sense of loss within the private realm of their homes and families, or through communal practices such as funeral rituals and public acts of memorialisation. The first part of the chapter deals with the presence of the missing in the personal and social life of the returnees. It describes how the returnees' "homecoming" was marked by the recovery of mortal remains that returnees found in their gardens and fields. I found that excessive losses¹⁰⁰ have affected family structures, and have also decimated the assumptive worlds of survivors and relatives of the dead, invoking new relational structures and approaches to sense making. I refer to the life stories of elderly women as a social group that experiences the present absence of their younger relatives acutely due to their age and social position. However, even within this group, different individuals embody different temporal dispositions and varying perceptions and meanings are attached to their past experiences and present life. In the second part of the chapter, I explore communal rituals as a space for expressing individual loss, refashioning collective identity and the social production of space. In all communal practices, the dead are perceived not merely as ghosts of the past, but are rather

⁹⁹ In conversation, London December 2007.

¹⁰⁰ Whilst my focus here is on the loss of human life and its impact on survivors and families, it is worth noticing many of my informants have experienced a myriad sense of loss, such as loss of home, of childhood or of a generation, and for some, a loss of future. The notion of loss is defined as an emotional assault on survivors' world of meaning and the process of grieving is examined as a way of reconstructing self, identity and creating new meanings and belonging produced through communal practices.

regarded as current social figures, encapsulated in various collective categories that play a role in the remaking of social and political life in the community. In part this is because of the hole in the community's social fabric resulting from the deliberate targeting of respected figures and potential community leaders in 1992 - precisely the people others would turn to in a time of rebuilding and return - but in part this is also a simple human response to the loneliness and absence of loved ones (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). For whilst I found that these communal practices do indeed provide followers with succour, or sometimes an end to formal mourning and a new sense of belonging, my research also found that loneliness remains an overwhelming and pervasive factor in individual and communal life.¹⁰¹

Unearthing the Missing

Those years, she [Republic of Srpska] was still smelling of blood and crime. Bones were still visible on the grass, blood of civilians was smelling... With tears in his eyes, he was barely able to pass through the shrubs, broken bricks and cement to reach the back entrance [of his destroyed house]. There, on the 25th of May [1992], he had seen his grandmother for the last time. All is empty...he nearly expected to find her there...nearly...¹⁰²

Relationships between person and place have been explored in various fields of literature; for example, phenomenological studies have illuminated the structure of sentiments such as 'out of place', home, not belonging, nostalgia and so on (Tilly 1997, Casey, 2004). Many of these sentiments are understood as a longing or a nostalgia for "the good old days", and rarely refer to the anguish of loss and its psycho-physical symptoms¹⁰³. Understandably, for many people living in the Western world, leaving home is a matter of choice where, relatively speaking, freedom of movement and safety is taken for granted. However, for many others, it is a wretched experience, and for

¹⁰¹ The specific notion of loneliness as an experience of permanent emptiness, resulting from the excessive loss but also of the feeling of "being abandoned" at present, is noted by several Bosnian psychologists who have worked with patients diagnosed with PTSD. See documentary, Fantazija. xy films, Sarajevo, 2007.

¹⁰² From Satko Mujagic's blog <http://kasaba.blogger.ba/arhiva/?start=560>

¹⁰³ However, as Fullilove noticed, centuries ago, nostalgia was perceived as an illness that can have detrimental effects on its patients sometime resulting in death or suicide. He points out that an equivalent, modern expression of nostalgia could be seen in depression. During my fieldwork, for example, I noted that many returnees conversing among themselves, spoke about how return, permanent or temporary, gave them a new lease of life. Individuals from the diaspora would discuss online, days in advance of an anticipated trip home, how, as soon as they approach Kozarac, life felt lived as oppose to "preživljavanje", surviving - an understanding of life in exile.

those “unwanted” individuals who remain or return, their presence is often degraded by those in power, which leads to alienation in their communal life. Hence, for those forcibly removed and their communities, their place of birth carries a particular sense of self that has been made invisible or unworthy of exploration when they are denied it. In short, their sense of identity is undermined. Recent studies on “psychology of place” examine the connection between individuals and their intimate environment in terms of attachment, familiarity and identity (Fullilove, 1996). Psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and anthropologists, have all begun to recognise the significance of a loss of place, in particular the loss of a communal life, for a displaced population’s mental health, and have started considering how this might be incorporated within the medical realm of treatments and diagnosis¹⁰⁴.

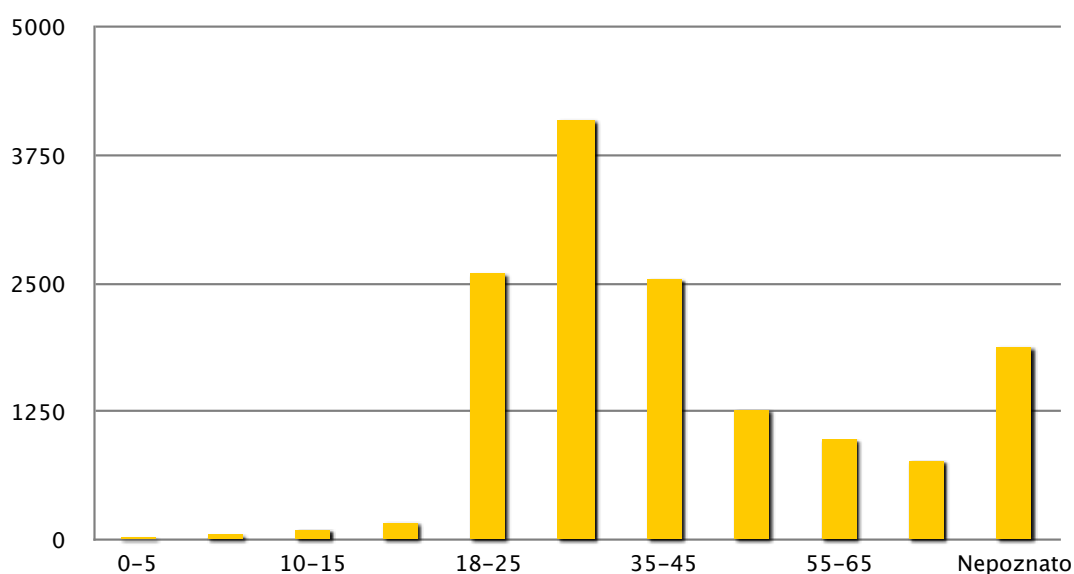
As the last few decades of the twentieth century witnessed conflicts creating millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, it became evident that a “troubled population” suffers in terms of re-establishing themselves in a new “unconquered environment” in addition to the burden of recovery from trauma related to war or torture¹⁰⁵. For returnees, after a violent conflict and destruction of home and families, return home often means a return to an unfamiliar landscape permeated with various environmental, economical and socio-political hindrances. In other words, it is a dynamic and contested process in which those who return have to negotiate their position in a new context of power and inequalities (Hammond 1999, 2004, Eastmond, 2004, Ranger, 1994, Majodina, 1995). Of course, some familiarity and connection with a place remains through memories or images from the past in relation to the missing relatives or childhood memories embodied in a particular physical site. For example, a few people residing outside Bosnia have communicated to me how important it is for them to visit, once a year, their former home and go fishing in the streams where they used to play with their siblings and friends as children. Reminiscing about those days, recalling different, happier times, one informant told me how he used his gaze to regulate his moods by recalling a particular past event, all the while hoping that no other returnees would puncture his fantasy by greeting him. In fact, he did not want to dwell much on the present position of his estranged community as, for him, communal life

104 See, for example work of Summerfield (2003) on Bosnian victims in London and their mental health

105 See University of Harvard Report on Displacement.

was now non-existent. He wanted instead to reach an old part of his self, uninterrupted by fellow returnees or indeed by the haunted landscape that surrounded him¹⁰⁶.

In the stories of four middle-aged women, all permanent returnees, I explore their perceptions and feelings associated with loss and processes of communal reintegration, how their personal loss is managed and to what extent “being at home” has helped in personal recovery. I also consider whether the feelings of alienation so often recalled by the forcibly displaced population have been assuaged to some extent, or whether perhaps an entirely new sense of estrangement has emerged. In any case, the process of reintegrating oneself into a community one imagined as your own has its own challenges as these processes are as much about definition by exclusion as by inclusion. Elderly women¹⁰⁷ are a very interesting group for this study, as they have endured a disproportionate impact of loss in this region, where the age group 25-35 was the most highly targeted segment of the population, as the graph below illustrates.¹⁰⁸



Deaths by age group during the war in the Prijedor region, collected by the Research and Documentation Centre, Sarajevo (Nepoznato means unknown)

¹⁰⁶ In conversation with former soldier, May, 2007

¹⁰⁷ All my elderly informants are those who have returned permanently, and in most cases have either lost most of their children or those who have survived live in other parts of Bosnia or a former republic of Yugoslavia. It is important to note this, as those who remain in exile and spend their summers in Kozarac, might have a very different attachment, and anxieties, in relation to the “new” place and their sense of belonging due to family abroad, particularly to their grandchildren.

¹⁰⁸ Istraživačko Dokumentacioni Centar, Sarajevo

(I)

When I began my fieldwork in May 2007, after spending a few days at a friend's house, an old widow took me in. Mersa, aged seventy, was one of the first people to return to Kozarac in 1999. Her house's outer walls, unusually, were still standing at the time of her return, and so the building retains a look that is evocative of the architecture of pre-war Kozarac. Before she returned, Mersa received a donation from a German humanitarian agency, who employed local Serb workmen to repair the house. Recounting those days, she remembered her frustration and anger when asked by Serb refugees who were living in a local primary school if they could move in with her, as she was alone. A decade on, her discontent with the way that her house was rebuilt is still very much present. The creaking stairs and draughty windows both precipitate her sense of grievance. She remarks how once there had stood a beautifully crafted wooden spiral staircase, which her husband and son spent many days building, and how the new badly-constructed stairs take centre stage in her living room, so there is no escaping the comparison. She often directs a monologue towards them, as though visitors are not present. The stairs represent both a good, old time, permeated with family warmth, and also "the ugliness of present existence," as she says, which reminds her of her loss.

Mersa's story was particularly poignant to me as it embodies many aspects of pre- and post-war life in Bosnia. Her only son was killed on the first day of the ethnic cleansing in May 1992. As with so many returnees, she was incarcerated in one of the camps, and then lived in Croatia, where her husband died. Her everyday routine consists of daily prayers, a search for drinking water (the local authority provides only one hour of water during summer months) and evening walks through the town. In Bosnian culture, generally speaking, it is rare to find an elderly person who has no family to help with daily chores, especially since she must fetch water on time every morning so that her garden and food can be taken care of. These daily house chores are seemingly remnants of her past life that connect her with a constant sense of being deprived of her loved ones. Her home contains a collection of memorabilia relating to her son. On the living room walls there are a few photographs from the 1980's that depict happy days of garden parties, with her son surrounded by friends and neighbours. In the late evenings, as I approached her front door, I would hear her reciting a prayer in a corner of the living room, where most of those photographs reside. At times, I felt uneasy as, in the

darkness of the night, the house felt like a shrine, wanting to be left alone, without my interruptions.

(II)

Mersa is still waiting for her prayer's answer - to find the remains of her son - whilst many other returnees in this area have discovered their relatives' bones in surrounding fields and their own gardens. Nana Hima is a seventy-three year old mother of my principal informant, and a friend who kindly let me come and stay whenever I needed to retreat from Kozarac to their lovely, quiet house set on the hills above in Kozarusa. She recalled her first visit to her destroyed home and how her mind kept wondering whether they would step onto the bones of her late husband. During her incarceration in the camp of Trnopolje, she heard stories of her husband hiding in the forests, and how he was captured and murdered in their garden, where his remains lay. Her first visit home resonated with these stories that she got used to hearing during the imprisonment, and later on in exile, but she was unable to search the grounds as they were completely overgrown with bushes¹⁰⁹. Her son, Iso, who has lived in Slovenia since the 1980's, decided to visit their former Serb neighbours and ask them about the fate of his father. After a few drinks, a Serb neighbour told him that his father was indeed murdered in front of their home and buried in the garden. They paid local Serbs to clear out the garden, as they were concerned about mines. The grave was exactly where their neighbour told them, covered with planks of wood. Nana Hima spoke to me about the discovery of her husband's remains as an "act of fate". She has constructed a story that she calls the "circle of life," which serves a religious purpose for her - a sense that one life is complete albeit imbued with pain and struggle. Narrating the story of her husband's exhumation by her son, she speaks as though she was (emotionally) present:

My son took him out under a large pile of planks that were scattered all over him, but he had to put him back there immediately as they were waiting for

109 An anthropologist, Sara Wagner, (2008) writes eloquently on the subject of survivors and families of the missing's imagination, memories and processes of identification, social and scientific, as a way of closing a knowledge gap that resulted from violence and ruptures. She talks of the need to construct a story of a "found body" as a social being. I encountered these processes among Kozarac returnees and survivors, but I have also observed how their return is also perceived and incorporated within their story of "lost and found", as it were, personhood. For many, confronting the past, that is, integrating their trauma in all important aspects of their life, enables them to move on. Many perceive this process as an essential element of individual and societal post-war reconstruction.

the forensic team to investigate the location. For Iso, that was the most difficult moment in his life: putting back his father into the grave and covering him with a plastic bag as it was about to rain. That night, twelve relatives and friends gathered in order to guard the grave until morning. Serbs drove hundreds of cars most of the night, singing and waving their Serb flags, shooting into the air...as though to frighten us. And all of them drove to our Serb neighbours.¹¹⁰

In fact, at the time, Nana Hima was unaware that her husband had been found. She was living in Lusci Palanki, just across the inter-entity boundary in the Federation, where most Kozarac displaced people waited for return in a kind of temporary staging post. However, she was aware that her son's search was underway and a night later, her husband's remains were, with other bodies, brought in a van, and parked in her courtyard. In the morning, upon discovering that her husband's remains spent a night in her front yard, she construed it to be a story of fate: *"You see what fate is, God's will, that his bones, all night sleep in my courtyard...After camps, exile in Slovenia and return to Lusci Palanki...We meet again...Fate reconnected us again. A life circle. He saw us again, with God's mercy"*.

During their time in Lusci Palanki, it was common practice for displaced people to go to their dilapidated homes, gardens and brooks in search of missing relatives. Those that were found would be brought to Lusci Palanki, and would be laid under the improvised tent, in the vicinity of their homes. They would visit the tent and many would volunteer to wash the bones and clothes as a way of helping the forensic team to identify the bodies¹¹¹.

110 Fieldnotes, 26 October, 2007.

111 Recent articles by forensic anthropologists suggest that, apart from identification, allowing families of the missing and communities to participate or/and be present at the work on the missing ensures their sense of being in control but also helps them work through the grieving process. See the work of Stover, E (2002)

(III)

Rabia, whose three sons were executed beneath Mount Kozara during the hunt for those who were hiding and resisting imprisonment in the early days of the ethnic cleansing, recounts her story in a more disrupted manner. She recalls her experiences of being captured and taken to the camp of Trnopolje, and her subsequent expulsion and life in exile, and then return, in what Langer (1991) calls “durational time” - a time in which various events from the past and the present converge:

My husband was in Keraterm camp and they told him your three sons are murdered. ...He died [after return] but wouldn't tell me, he always carried their pictures with him. He would go under a bridge in Croatia and would cry looking at their pictures...A cow gave birth, my husband was hiding in the stream behind our house. He returned home afternoon to let a calf out to graze...It was quiet, no one around. Serbs surrounded our home, fully armed and said: Boss, surrender yourself. A thirty guns on his head. Kill the old man! But a neighbour didn't let them. They searched the house looking for cigarettes. My husband rolled tobacco for all of them....They took him to Keraterm camp...I thought there are camps in Serbia. I thought there may be my sons. My husband already knew. I was in Zenica after the camp. In Croatia and then Jasenica in Slovenia. We reached Zenica by train. When my cousin phoned and said my husband has reached Croatia and my older son, Smail. We, in Zenica, two grandchildren and a daughter. We wanted to go to Croatia...”

After reaching Croatia, Rabia was not allowed to stay in the country, so she moved to Slovenia where her relatives lived, but she managed to cross the border at night:

My husband kept calling me to come. And what could I have done? I got a car, paid a hundred marks to man to drive me across the border. And we were not checked nor asked to return [on Croatian border]. We were lucky. I kept asking when will we reach Croatia. We were in Croatia but I was so confused...My husband cried out and said we only have two children now. He died but wouldn't say. He told his sister but not to me. He says: she is a mother...We returned to Lusci Palanki, he got ill. No transport to take him to hospital but I saw Sead Cirkin he gave us a car and a driver. I walked upstairs but he is not in a room for smokers. Opened his room's door, his bed empty. I thought perhaps they took him for tests...They asked me are you looking for Mr Oric. He died. I began to cry. They took me to a nurse and...when they began to ask me about my children I thought I was going to die. I hear from Seida, they are going to Sanski Most, a free town. She gave me a phone number of man who could transport us to Sanski Most but my husband wouldn't wait. He found a truck and in the dawn we began our

journey with two mattresses and two iron beds. Someone gave us bed linen. ...I tell you, we have suffered a lot. We arrived in Lusci Palanki, it rained. And on television, they were saying come back home people, come back...My sister in law was first to be killed. She was always making food for us and was on her way home. They killed my mother...My father was in the house...they killed him as well. My son just managed to cover his body with a blanket. Children hungry, nothing to eat. My three daughters in law, grandchildren, my youngest unmarried son. We are all in a bunker. I found some milk, children drunk it. There is no bread...Nihad [son] went with his wife and kids hiding in the forests. I picked up some strawberries. A house is burning near by. Then, I got some cherries for children, they ate and fell asleep. I have no room to sleep. Now, one of them [her grandchildren] serve in French Army. I cover us with tree branches, to hide... I lay over a suitcase of my dear son Nijaz when someone is calling my name. Rabia come out. I moved the branches ah...I surrendered, and told them about you. Colourful uniforms, Cetniks stood all around us. They said: come out we will not harm you...

With hindsight, she mourns the loss of her son's suitcase and a pair of trousers as they were in some way the last tangible reminders of him, before describing the last part of her journey to freedom:

My son's suitcase stayed there filled with clothes and my dear son's new trousers. We walked towards my sister house and I looked around. They say: if your house is not burnt go and get yourself clothes and food, freely. Trucks loaded with soldiers passing by, throwing biscuits onto us. Children are picking it...They stole all from our shops. I do not know where they are taking us...A cattle train, we heard, was taking us towards Zenica. Near Doboje, they stopped the train in the tunnel, they were told to crash the train and kill us all but a train driver wouldn't so we walked to the territory under the Bosnian Army...

Her experience of family disruption has only deepened her sense of loss. It is manifested in the fact that she is hampered by the absence of some of her grandchildren in her life, whilst the presence of others evoke memories of her sons:

My grandson, my Nihad's son, he [Nihad] has three children. My daughter-in-law always brings them to visit me whilst the youngest daughter in law once brought my granddaughter to me in Lusci Palanka. I said, is that you my daughter in law, Dijana? She changed her hair colour...Seven days my granddaughter stayed with me then. I never saw them again. Last year, we were traveling to Prijedor when I met an acquaintance of mine. I asked him to look up my daughter-in-law who lives in France as I know nothing of her.

He did and I got a phone number. She never called me back. It seems she married a man who does not want her to talk with me. I spoke once with my granddaughter but she did not understand me. She knew no Bosnian....If, at least, I knew where they live, to send them gifts...I went to the cemetery with my other grandson...he bought lilies for his father and his uncles, and when he read the name of his father on the gravestone, he began to cry...Is this where my father lay? Every time they come to visit, they go to the cemetery.

Thus, Rabia's perception of and visits to her sons' graves are articulated as a "reminder" of her loss: "My children were buried after the second mass funeral in Kamicani. I did not attend the graves for two years. When I do visit I feel horrible, I feel only a need to cry...three sons and brother-in-law..." Her knowledge of people who murdered her sons and who are, apparently, still living in a nearby Serb village, keeps her determined to bring them to justice:

Seida took death certificates of my sons. As I know who killed my sons, I have a witness who hid behind the bush and watched when they took them in the field...I dream about them sometime. Oh, I see them like...I did register those two who murdered them...A man saw them being killed...

Salih [a neighbour] was good with Serbs. They leant him onto the large stone and ordered Himzo [her son] to shoot him but he would not. Two [Serbs] went inside the house, when they took Hanifa [Salih's wife] out, she was naked covered in blood, raped...they put them all together in Salih's orchard. Milos [a Serb neighbour] did not want to shoot at first but when his companion did, he too did. They all fell. Salih was wounded. When they left Salih got up. Salih told us who murdered them; my three sons and several other villagers. He said Milos and Dusko's son killed them. Another witness, Enes, saw it all.

After describing the event of her sons' murder, she continues the story of how, the witness, Enes, informed her family and then invited her to their home and described the event of her sons being murdered:

Enes wants to see you [this was when she lived in Lusci Palanka]. I met Enes and his family. They [her family] asked me to have a pill to relax, there is no night that I don't take one since then. I slept at theirs for two nights. I went to look for them [her sons] around Salih's house...All day I looked. I chain smoked. I came home and then after a few days again I went looking for them. They told me where they were murdered but shrubs were everywhere. Once a neighbour, Meho, walked around and he found them.

They were not buried at all, they dumped them on a dirt road that no one goes to....seven of them. Meho was picking mushrooms and found them. I wanted to go there to see them but they were already transported to Lusci Palanki. I smoked two cigarettes and drunk some tea. On a large piece of carton was written Strmac, that's where they were found. When we arrived in Palanka, there was no electricity. I called Radio Prijedor in Lusci Palanki saying: did our children deserve to be in an improvised tent...I went to the Pollce in Sanski Most to give evidence [of two men who murdered her sons] but nothing....When I went to look for my children, everyone was surprised but I had to...had no one to do that for me. After all, let my children be buried too as others.

(IV)

The experience of Ika, a middle aged Serb woman who lives in the centre of Kozarac, resembles many aspects of the struggle of the three women above - re-defining what is 'home' after expulsion and (in)ability to deal with loss - and yet, uniquely, she never left her home. Ethnic cleansing changed her predominantly Bosniak community, whilst the process of their return has redefined a sense of belonging. Her loss of a husband and a 21 year-old son is mourned only in the privacy of her home. She feels as though her best friends have returned but "things are not the same". They do not visit each other. She talks how her son was "the first to declare loyalty to Bosnia" and her family is "very mixed". Her husband was a Croat, and his father was a Muslim. So, she considers herself of not belonging to anything in particular: "Ika Mandic, I am nothing, neither Serb nor Croat or Muslim". But she is very aware of her Serb heritage: "I am not guilty that I come from that miserable background". Prior to the war, she lived a good life, her husband earning his salary in Germany, whilst she worked as a cook in many local restaurants in Kozarac and Prijedor. When the ethnic cleansing in Kozarac began, she "joined my people in Trnopolje camp". Her inquiry into the fate of her husband and son, in the camps of Trnopolje and Omarska, exposed her to all kinds of physical and mental torture in which she often was called a "*Muslim Balinkusa*". In the camp, she felt that Muslims were avoiding her, and that she was mistreated by Serbs. As a result, she regards her suffering as a unique: "no one has survived what I have".

From the camp, she eventually returned home surrounded by a "ghost town", whilst her house stood empty of all household goods. Even now, sixteen years later, her house remains unfurnished, with a very few basic goods such as a bed, a small table and a few

chairs centred around a stove. As we sipped local plum brandy, *rakija*, she kept reminding me that “I can take what I think is relevant and can forget her rambling on about her neighbours who turned away from her,” clearly not wanting to appear critical of them. She remarks that her life is very poor now, and she cannot buy herself any clothes from her insignificant RS pension, but she manages to grow enough food in her garden to survive, and annual visits from her foreign friends help her get by. She notices how other women, victims of war (and accepted as such), get much more humanitarian aid at the *Srcem do Mira* centre, but she is never invited. She only wants to be “accepted as a victim, a human being who also lost her loved ones”. She recalls the early days of return, and her happiness at encountering and welcoming her friends and neighbours, who were very generous in giving gifts to her. She remembers how she helped them by letting them stay in her house and use her telephone to keep in touch with their families abroad, whilst building their own houses. And now, the only comfort she finds in the community is not with her old best friends that she helped, but with those mothers, like herself, who lost children and “understand the pain of a broken heart”.

She feels ashamed of her Serb heritage and keeps remarking how she would never ask them for anything as they are “*Chetnici*” (Chetniks, or ultra-nationalists). At the same time, she is very aware that she is estranged from her Bosniak community: “*My mother-in-law, despite being married to a Muslim, a woman who wore all her life dimiye and shamiya, [traditional Bosnian Muslim clothes inherited from the Ottomans], a few years ago, she was not allowed to be buried in the Muslim cemetery. Instead, she had to be buried among Chetnici, in a Serb cemetery, away from her husband*”. Despite her experience of a communal life in which she does not appear to have a place, she chooses to stay with them: “*My Kozarac, my people. I attached myself onto them like a drumstick to a drum. I have “prisvojila” (adopted) to them, let God forgive them...*” Even Ika’s vocabulary resembles that of a Bosnian Muslim. She greets me with “*merhaba*”, and constantly refers to ‘dear, great Allah’ in speaking. When I greeted her with a “good day” she replied “*aleykumu selam*”. Visiting Ika is always disturbing, as it touches the core of human identity as social beings, inextricably linked to one another, whilst illuminating the painful experience and shame when a human being is rejected by all. Like the stories of emotional turmoil from her Bosniak counterparts, hers too are imbued with pain and suffering; however, hers is unshared and unrecognised by her

communities, so she keeps resisting complete alienation by inventing herself, through a language, carving out her imaginary sense of belonging. Some perceive this adaptation as a sign of madness, and regard her as a “woman who lost the plot”.

At Home: Group Belonging as Communal Healing

It brought me back onto my feet, this town and this people. There, I was withering away, without feeling it. Like a frog in the water that's slowly boiling but she does not jump out because she does not know she will boil down as it happens gradually...Only now do I see how everything is feeding me, a glimpse of smile, an ordinary word, a meaningless glance, a tasteless music...How strange it is man awakes “when he returns”, how life is full... (a friend who recently returned to Bosnia, 2010)

Even the handful of stories above demonstrate how within the same social group, various different temporal dispositions and constructions of meaning concerning loss are at work. Clinical psychologists argue that there is a direct correlation between individual experience of loss and processes of bereavement on one hand and the way our “working models of self” are constructed, on the other. Ostensibly, these models of self are seen as irreducibly personal, but they are essentially anchored in our relations with significant others, and arguably within our “outer environment”¹¹². In our life, inner models of self are contingent on very early social bonds we form, thus influencing what type of self is formed. For example, insecurities or neglect by parents in early childhood can result in the construction of an insecure model of self that, in the wake of traumatic loss, can prolong and complicate a sense of grievance. I do not intend to explore a psychological avenue of understanding and ask why particular behavioural and perceptual patterns prevail; however, it is important to be aware of these findings, as I have observed varying perceptions and ways in which individuals manage their loss in different contexts, and this has implications for how we deal with return and other aspects of post-conflict reconstruction. Although violence and loss suffered as a result of war can have detrimental effects on an individual, and often transform his or her personal and social sense of identity, my evidence suggests that pre-existing personhood remains a key factor in how this plays out.

¹¹² Fullilove (1996) writes about the “outer environment”, that is, a place that one inhabits as an important factor in the development of human life. Claiming that safety of our intimate surroundings, our attachment, exploration and creativity borne out of such interaction, all play a part in our life as social and psychological beings.

As we observe in the case of Mersa, her home is a ghost of her previous life, as it is imbued with family memories before the war whilst its new reconstruction represents “the ugliness of present existence”. There is a large literature on the mnemonic properties of material culture, specifically on home as a dwelling space and place of memories (Marcoux, 2001; Parkin, 1999). Mersa’s story suggests that homes can, besides triggering memories from the past, also be perceived as “second bodies” (Lang, 1985). This is usually exemplified through analysis of childhood homes as principal sites of inhabitation (Chawla, 1994). However, in this case, we see how home can be reconstructed as an intimate site of worship (a prayer room filled with old photographs of Mersa’s son). Y. Danieli has written about the need of the bereaved families of 9/11 attack to have some tangible objects to hold in their hands in the absence of bodies as part of the mourning process. In my observation of the bereaved families, I found that in the absence of bodies, many turn to physical sites of memory as a way of reconnecting with the spirit or image of the dead. It seems to have a particular calming effect on the individuals, and helps assert their own sense of themselves as social beings that last longer than their lifespan (E.Hallam, J. Hockey, 1999). Moreover, even when a body is found, many choose to continue imagining meeting their loved ones “behind a tree” or in many cases using the physical landscape as a source of “good memories” of those past relationships that continue in the present (cf.Hallam & Hockey, 2001). The experience of families of the missing that over a decade or more have become used to “living without knowing” has a profound impact on the way they construct their own reality, even if a body is eventually found. In other words, the prolonged state of not knowing what happened to the loved ones creates a state of being in which hope and a sense of loss coexist in a dream-like reality: “...*would her prematurely killed child appear? All the time thinking she is dreaming until one day, here, we found him in that and that pit. And since then, she recalls like before. She dreams of him how, despite it all, he is coming back...*”¹¹³

The physical destruction of a community impacts deeply on the consciousness of its inhabitants. Some scholars have argued that effacement of communal life can leave many adrift (Fullilove, 1996, Fried, 1963), as in the case of Ika. She remained at home,

113 Fieldnotes, July 2008.

but her sense of belonging has been compromised by the war's legacy of politicisation of identities and belonging. Like Nana Hima, she manages her war experiences and life in complete privacy at home, but not by choice. Her experience of alienation is profound in that every day feels lonely as "I have no longer a friendship of any sort...I am alone". And while one can observe individuals passing by Ika's house greeting her, she has effectively lost her place in the community. During my fieldwork, I rarely heard people referring to the small number of Serb or Croat houses that constitute part of the centre of Kozarac. Members of these households sometimes directly participated in the ethnic cleansing. The first case brought to the Hague Tribunal, the now infamous Tadic case, was of a Serb from Kozarac who willingly tortured and killed his neighbours and friends. But there are very different stories also, often involving mixed marriages, like the Serb woman who was unable to fathom the violence inflicted on her husband and the community, and who committed suicide. Or the story of a young Serb, Sasha, who joined the 17th Brigade after expulsion. These examples are seldom present in any discussions among members of the local community at times when the war experience is discussed, and this level of complexity and detail is sadly missing from most policy debates about how to deal with post-war societies in transition.

On the other hand, Nana Hima's daily visits from families and friends, centred around coffee drinking, gardening and narratives concerning children and marriages, all suggest a return to a "normal life". In fact, her home felt closest to the prewar experience of a Bosnian life, where family life, respect for the elderly and neighbourly help in all spheres of life remain a prevalent social norm. Yet, surrounded by many empty houses and a dearth of children in the neighbourhood, one often witnesses narratives of loss and a yearning for the living members of the community, which is in stark contrast to the number of dead that were exhumed in several mass graves in the vicinity. This kind of longing for the old way of life is constantly worked through in terms of discourses on survival. Accepting the reality of life at present, many remark how, despite estrangement and concerns whether their community will survive, return is seen as a testament that one can envisage, and therefore create, a better future at home. For individuals who have returned and "worked it through" by integrating events from the past into the present, survival is used in the past tense. In other words, "*preživjeli smo*" (we have survived) is part of life allocated to a particular time and place.

Nana's story, or at least her personal narration to me, is permeated with a sense of betrayal by her former Serb neighbour, Savka, but also of mourning the loss of a dear friend. When she speaks of the Serb crowd's intimidation during the night when her family guarded the grave of her late husband, she briefly mentions "and all of them drove to our Serb neighbours". It seems unimportant, as she does not dwell on it, but every morning while we drank our coffee, she would look through her window across the road onto the land and family home of her Serb neighbour, and most of her stories from the past would somehow mention Savka. She would speak of the support that she has given to her neighbour at times when she suffered at the hands of an alcoholic and abusive husband. Nana comes from a generation that had a particular code of behaviour towards their non-Muslim neighbours, and it was not a custom for women to visit their Christian counterparts at their homes. Nonetheless, they met on the road for a chat, or to exchange experiences when needed. And, at times, she would invite Savka to stay at her home when Savka's family violence was unbearable. Nana's memory of support and trust between the two women, coupled with the murder of her husband, believed to have been committed by a neighbour, has left her with an emotional void that she is unable to reconcile. She believes that Savka "could not look into my eyes" when she returned home, before Savka left for Serbia to die, as "she knew who killed my husband and where he was buried". She remains alert to the activities of Savka's sons as they work in the fields that border her land, always waiting for a moment when she can summon the courage to tell them that "they cannot steal from her and her community" anymore. However, when such a moment arises, she conceded she was unable to approach them.

Rabia's story of the irreplaceability of her loss, despite efforts to lessen its impact through finding the graves of her sons, and then losing her husband and an inability to repair family relations have clearly left her unable to see an end to her suffering. Her only wish is to see the murderers of her sons in court as a way of at least satisfying justice. But she is aware this is unlikely to happen in the present, so she keeps active by giving her story to various journalists, academics and anyone interested in reporting her plight. Her two store house appeared unlivable, despite her presence, as all rooms apart from the ground floor are empty. I first visited Rabia when Nana and her daughter Seida

invited me to go “*na sijelo*”¹¹⁴. As we entered her home, she immediately inquired about her sons’ death certificates, which my friend was helping her to obtain from the local authority in Prijedor. She was unable to claim any compensation in terms of pension, like many parents were, immediately after the war in the Federation. Her sense of unacknowledged loss, in a wider experience of the collective, further alienates her from her own community.

In a similar manner, Ika suffers complete isolation from her immediate Bosniak neighbours in Kozarac, where she is not perceived to have suffered by one community and regarded as *persona non grata* by another. She is unwanted and invisible, despite having stayed in her home throughout both war and return. In such a social environment, she has changed her behaviour radically, adapting the “visible manners” and attributes of a Bosnian Muslim. During long conversations with her, and at moments when she lets her guard down, she concedes “I am more a Muslim than many of them”. She continues to absorb the vocabulary of appropriate religious and cultural references of her “emerging community” in the hope that she will eventually be regarded as belonging to it. She remarks how only men, mainly from the diaspora, tend to greet her when passing by, but that no-one visits her. Her physical home is a peculiar example of a Bosnian postwar life, in the sense that on the outside, it resembles the unattainable image of the past due to its untarnished and unchanged facade, whilst inside it contains a fragmented picture of a lonely life.

Loneliness is palpable in the individual and communal experience of everyday life, despite various attempts to assuage it. During my subsequent visit to Rabia (and Ika), immediately upon my arrival, Rabia began telling her story and continued for five hours, as I recorded her narrative. She was not unusual in her need to talk, as I have often encountered women that I stayed with who would spend most of the night recounting their war stories and experiences since return, always imbued with a tangible sense of loss and grief. These narratives were not necessarily about telling a coherent

114 Before television was invented, people in villages would gather and help a neighbour with his harvest. These food preparation rituals were mainly conducted in a sitting manner. Adults would be husking corns whilst singing and chatting. Older children would be looking for a date and younger ones would play hide and seek until they succumbed to sleep. These days, *sijelo* is all about paying a visit to a neighbour after his relative is identified or making sure that a lonely member of community is looked after, that is, visited on a regular basis.

story. They often serve the need of the narrator to relieve, albeit temporarily, an emotional burden of unmediated traumatic memories, and in some cases, psychophysical symptoms pertaining to “complicated grief” such as sleep disturbance, skin rashes and loneliness¹¹⁵. Many elderly women have acquired paid younger women helpers as a way of compensating for missing family relatives. These individuals are employed by the women’s relatives in the diaspora and they either are full time caretakers, as in the case of Rabia, or simply spend nights at their homes.

Langer¹¹⁶ has claimed that incoherent or disjointed representations of suffering in the narratives of survival illustrate the true meaning of the ordeal suffered, and while that may be the case in the immediate aftermath of the event, I have observed that a lack of acceptance of loss plays an instrumental role in the way one lives and perceives one’s past experiences in the long term¹¹⁷. Loss, rather than an incomprehensible suffering, is what defines the human way of coping and self-narrating. Those who have managed to construct a story that makes their life liveable again, such as Nana’s act of fate, give themselves a sense of an illusionary end and reaffirm their agency (Lifton, 1999, Jackson, 2002, Kerby, 1991). Being in control of one’s destiny after surviving such events seems to be essential for recovery and good health (Herman, 1992. Lifton1999).

115 Dozens of women have all complained about problems with digestion, sleeplessness and skin rashes that were often noted during the attack on their homes and continue to be a major condition of the sufferers at present. Nonetheless, some noted that physical symptoms either disappeared or occur less often since return. Communal attachment and care were regarded as main contributors to their well being. Recent literature on loneliness has noted that loss of a shared, communal way of life in Britain and US has had significant effects on the elderly population in relation to health. Cacioppo has conducted various longitudinal studies regarding the effects of loneliness on individuals. He points out how loneliness, as a direct result of loss and violence, have psychological symptoms such as disassociation, lack of trust and other asocial behavioural tendencies, but also physical symptoms which may contribute to premature death. The main Imam of Kozarac spoke of those in exile who have prematurely died as a direct result of war. He noticed that many were in their early thirties when the ethnic cleansing took place and that their age or what he calls “being robbed of the early stage of adulthood or a family life” have left a permanent imprint onto their personhood, making them unable to start life anew. Instead, they adopted a way of life where they work abroad and live for spending summer vacations in Kozarac but never manage to release their “*pritisak*”, tension, explained as a psychophysical symptom that embodies their bodies and mind.

116 Langer (1991) and others have written about the chaotic or inconsistent ways in which survivors of trauma speak of their experiences. A lack of chronology in the narratives of survivors is regarded as symptomatic of the experience suffered, but also a more truthful depiction of the past in contrast to chronological time that puts human experiences in temporal boxes with a beginning and an end.

117 I concur with Neimeyer’s claims that inability to make sense of loss in terms of an individual (in)ability to create a coherent self narrative predicated upon a combination of factors such as survivor’s experience, individual psychological predispositions and self perceptions can be seen as a key predictor of intensified grieving (Neimeyer, 2000, 2002) rather than individual suffering.



Returnee making herbal remedies from local plants

Rebooting Community

On the communal level, Mersa and other women gather in the communal centre of local NGO, *Srcem do Mira* (Through Hearts to Peace) in a former school building now known as the “House of Peace”. It is a place where elderly and young women with children meet on a daily basis, discussing everyday life, of course, but also sharing personal experiences of loss¹¹⁸, stories of injustice and discrimination relating to their current political and social status within the Prijedor municipality, and also funny stories about the diaspora who descend on the town every summer like tourists¹¹⁹. These are stories of belonging, home, memory and sometimes also of their challenges in asserting themselves in their former homes and confronting former neighbours - for example:

Goran [a policeman] and his grandmother entered [the communal building during elections]. Why did he fight? In his house, there are four voters and they only received one ballot paper. I didn't react nor did Suvada...there were many people around...I needed to give my post and all other paperwork to Mirko [a local policeman]. Suvada and I were entering [the building] and Mirko and Goran were playing cards. Goran blushed, looked at me and said “How come you, my neighbour, are not reacting to how many people [Serbs] are not on the list for voting?” I said, “why would I react?”. Suvada said to me “I will never again go anywhere with you”. Goran replied “Well, we are neighbours.” I said, “We were neighbours until 1992 and since 1992 we can never be neighbours again. If we were neighbours in 1992 you would have told me: “Hey you are young, this and this will happen, run.” I said: “You know very well that it was a Friday before the Sunday when all began [the attack], and your mother and wife were preparing some food saying they are going to Palacinste whilst I was waiting for a bus at the bus stop. She could have told me too....” I said: “Even if I could have helped [regarding voting] I would not. Who are you to me that I ought to report?” He became very angry, “how... he is in the uniform and I dare to speak like that”...Emsuda, [listening this story] replied, “You should have told him, you know Goran, your people are walking and ours are not [implying they are dead]....I always have something ready to tell them.”

118 Listening to these stories, initially, they all appear fragmented, going back and forward in time, in a way similar to Rabia's story. However, what I eventually learnt is that stories are told in such a way precisely because the audience is very familiar with each others' past experiences. So, there is no need to explain it in a way that is well articulated (and if I would interrupt, they would stop for a moment, and a listener would wave her hands as to say “details are not important, don't interrupt”). In other words, the focus is not on a particular story but rather on the emotions that are shared among the members.

119 See, for example, work by Kinsler (1988) on the importance of a meaningful community for the elderly survivors of the Holocaust.

“Do you remember the first conference?” [in Kozarac, another women said]. When Sada approached a [Serb] policeman and said: “What are all those crows over you? [meaning Serb symbols on his uniform] In ours, [Bosnian uniforms] we don’t have those only crescents, thank God”. Mentioning how her son has grown tall and strong...

The House of Peace (*Kuca Mira*) is both a centre of the local community and a staging post for international friends who have helped the town over the years, plus various researchers exploring post-war Bosnia. It organises various events, days of remembrance, conferences on human rights, educational workshops and women’s meetings. Spending time in the House of Peace, one can observe some remarkable interactions among well-meaning individuals from abroad and the local women.

I particularly recall one wonderful day filled with laughter when a young researcher from Finland organised an art workshop based on drawing family trees as a way of healing and dealing with trauma. On such occasions, Emsuda, the chair of the organisation, spreads the word to her women, who dutifully turn up to draw and be healed. As the women took part in this exercise, it was obvious many were humouring the nice young researcher, who was diligently and seriously searching for meaning in the drawings of the women. Meanwhile, the women were having their own private fun (the researcher did not speak Bosnian), laughing at each other’s inability to draw, ridiculing Emsuda’s attempt to match a story of her past struggles and future vision as closely as she could to the needs and expectations of the researcher; but all the while they were kind and not in the least bit cynical towards the nice young lady who thought she was helping them. These meetings bring something new into the mundane day-to-day life of the women, and as soon as spring approaches, they immerse themselves in organising the various social activities generated by the centre, which also provides some financial assistance in the form of odd jobs such as cooking or cleaning. But for me, the most important role the centre performs is as a communal institution where social norms and behaviours have been ritualised to the extent that it functions as an oasis of stability and socialisation amidst the general chaos and disorganisation of the town as a whole.

Mass Funerals: “Come Remember with Us”

The ceremonial of death which ties survivors to the body and rivets them to the place of death, the beliefs in the existence of the spirit, in its beneficent influences or malevolent intentions, in the duty of a series commemorative or sacrificial ceremonies - in all this religion counteracts the centrifugal forces of fear, dismay, demoralisation, and provides the most powerful means of reintegration of the group's shaken solidarity and of the re-establishment of its morale. (Malinowski, 1948:35)

I remember in 1998, standing over a pit full of bodies, just a few hundred metres above our house. It rained, and everything looked miserable and filthy. Bodies bathing in the mud. We just found a mass grave containing dozens of bodies. I was thinking of my father at the time so went to look at it. There was a forensic team already working, and around us Serb policemen were guarding it. It was a sad scene in which those bodies and their clothes appeared so wretched...I glanced at the policemen, they were smiling...¹²⁰

Every 24th May, on the anniversary of the attack on Kozarac, people gather on the main street of town, and after midday prayer in the main Mosque, they recreate a walk that was taken by many on that day in 1992, en route to the camps, to visit the *sehidsko mezarje* (martyrs' cemetery) in Kamicani. All shops are shut during the visit and no music is played in the usually busy bars and cafes on this day. Most women, young and old, cover their heads or wear long dresses that were, before the war, a rare sight among the younger generation. The image of hundreds of white head scarves on the main road of Kozarac, is an attempt to show the local Serb neighbours that they have not succeeded in ridding the area of its Muslim inhabitants.

The duty to remember war victims, and especially the significant number of victims of Twentieth Century genocides, and the various forms of remembering on both an individual and a societal level, have been researched by many different scholars. Some favour active forgiving and forgetting of past crimes, as in the case of Rwanda, whilst others have considered the importance of memory practices, such as the work of the Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) (Hinan, 2010). Regardless of approach, the context and nature of mass murder as remembered by the survivors, and the subsequent sociopolitical societal response, which is often referred to these days

¹²⁰ In conversation with Seida Karabasic, May 2007.

as a “transitional context”¹²¹, can tell us a great deal about the emotional orientation of the population in the present. In the following section, I shall examine the role of communal rituals pertaining to the dead, most notably the annual mass funerals and visits to the martyrs’ cemetery in Kozarac.



A mass funeral near Kozarac in 2009 (Emina Sivac)

121 defined as a context resulting from a particular sociopolitical structures of society that has undergone major events (Bar-Tal & Helperin, 2007)

In such a context, the personal experience of grief and remembering the dead is to a large extent subsumed within a collective framework and dynamic. The duty to provide a proper burial for a large number of victims stems from both an individual and collective need to remember the magnitude of loss stemming from mass killings. There is of course a religious component of a shared bereavement, and its accompanying norms of behaviour and dress code at the funeral events. But there is also a specific emotional climate that surrounds the ceremonies, and the way they are received by the wider social and political milieu. In relation to this, I explore a recent rumination of the religious leadership that attempted to historicise individual loss in the representation of Kamicanj cemetery, based on a concern that a large body of survivors appear uninterested in keeping the dead alive, whereas, in fact, most ordinary people of Kozarac are content to participate in the religious dimension of remembering, but perceive the politicisation of funeral practice as serving a different agenda.

In narratives and commemorative acts after mass violence, the duty to remember seems to be a principal form of dealing with both societal and individual personal experiences of trauma. In Kozarac, as in other places where a radical transformation of society has caused a particular group to feel invisible or unwanted, burial rites can appear to be divisive rituals in the post-war context, as they lay bare the gulf between those who want to forget (or indeed not to admit that the events even happened) and those who want to remember. Also, religious processions and ritualised social gatherings reaffirm and redefine the Muslim component of the survivors' identity, which was the basis on which they were attacked in the first place. However these overtly visual representations, mimesis, to apply Ricoeur's notion of imitation of the experience, mask human tensions caught up within the collective and personal perception and understanding of the shape and role the dead ought to play in the present. This contrasts with the more recent story of the building of the *Centralno Obilježje* memorial in Kozarac, which showed how the desire for memorialisation can sometimes conflict with a desire to move on after traumatic events, even among local people. After a major fund-raising campaign for a memorial in the town, there was much debate about whether it should reflect the living (present) or the dead (past), and although the majority were in favour of the former, the moral weight of the latter prevailed¹²².

122 See debate on kozarac.ba

Traditionally, commemorations have been regarded not only as visual representations of what has been lost, but also as embodying the potential for providing or facilitating “healing”, “closure” or focal point in the grieving process, both for the bereaved and for society as a whole. In the Bosnian case, mass funerary rites as forms of “living memorials” can seem to be “never ending” as already buried incomplete bodies continue to be augmented with more uncovered remains as years go by, prolonging the families’ emotional turmoil. In such a context, raw emotions and the horrors of the past continue to haunt the community, whilst a shared sense of pain solidifies solidarity among the community of mourners. For survivors and the witnesses to the murder of family members, neighbours and friends, the inability to provide help for a dying relative, and their participation in the disposal of the dead during their incarceration have all left deep psychological scars and a sense of remorse. In addition, the fact that over a thousand former camp inmates have yet to be found continues to exert emotional pressure on the families of the missing to actively play a part in the search for the missing. Within the entity of RS, dead civilians have never been officially incorporated and commemorated, because they are regarded as “theirs” (*njihovi*) rather than “ours” (*nas*), which further aggravates the plight of the survivors. Hence, the “duty of memory” for the survivors, as Nora’s notion of a responsibility for the individual to recapture and recognise the past, is strongly felt (Nora, 1989).

In public, the survivors sometimes speak of angry spirits haunting them, with the dead wanting to tell their story. This “mystical thought” about our ancestors, “ghosts that need to be settled” is closely related to the context in which someone dies and the way they are laid to rest (or not) (Graeber, 1997). In other words, the nature of death and its mourning rituals define to what extent the dead remain “alive” in the minds of surviving families and community. The familial duty, then, is based on the affection one has towards the dead relative, but also the effects that such a death might have on the living. Anthropological literature on death rituals, in so-called primitive cultures for example, observes funerary rites in which the body is freed to return to nature and the human spirit is elevated, wandering and/or settling among the living. As Malinowski writes in his *Magic, Science and Religion*, in death rituals, the spirit reinforces the human desire for life, transcending human finite existence (Bloch 1982, Malinowski 1992).

Emotions have often been examined as “a function of discourse”, with a focus on how political discourse is constructed on an emotional base (Harkin, 2003). Eminent Serbian ethnologist, Ivan Colovic (2002), has written extensively about the symbolic aspects of political power centred around the mythic topoi about “Serbian land as a territory defined by Serbian graves”. Examining Serbian folk and epic traditions, he contends that, in times of upheaval and disruption, the dead are imbued with agency, which is articulated in story-telling by the political and scholarly elite, who employ narrative time¹²³ to reconstruct or strengthen an imagined community and re-establish control over the symbols of political power (Colovic, 2002: 5). The obliteration of time and space, in Serbian mythology, has apparently created a time that exists beyond historical time - a kind of eternal presence. In such temporality, the war of the 1990s is perceived as a continuation of former wars, where contemporary Serbian leaders are imagined as reincarnations of mythical and legendary heroes in folk songs, literary work and ethno-national stories. Colovic claims that in the structure of a social life where the dead govern the living, one is devoid of reflection on what and who we are beyond the ethnic community as the “measure of all things”. In the Bosnian case of mass funeral rites, symbolic public ethno-national identity construction is clearly at work - employing the dead as enlisted informants to warn us of our duty to “remember them”, otherwise our survival on our ancestors’ land is doomed.

But when considering contemporary mass funeral practice in the area, it is important to recall how this process began, in order to show why mass funerals have become such a significant social and cultural practice among the returnees. As mentioned earlier, the discovery of mass graves by returnees was common in the early days of return. The pressing issue of the time was not finding the missing, as the graves seemed to appear of their own accord, but rather how to ensure that their remains were buried in their home town or village. Since the place had been ethnically cleansed of all non-Serb

123 See Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*, (1990) in which he defines emplotment as “the active sense of organising events into a system” (Ricoeur, p33). In other words, the real experience has a particular chronology, however, in order to create a desirable representation, artists, poetics re-organise or invent an order of the events to create the mimesis, an imitation, representation needed at the time. Like Colovic, Ricoeur notes that human predisposition to meaning-making is not entailed in the reality but rather in the act of ordering, in a plot, that does not focus on temporal character of reality but on its “logical character”.

inhabitants, home had become a territory transformed into a new statelet that does not want to embrace either its former Bosniak residents or their dead. For returnees, then, a struggle to bury the dead in their local cemeteries was regarded as a first step towards return. At the time, the local Serb authority was willing to transport them to the Federation, but would not allow any land in the Prijedor region to become a site for a graveyard¹²⁴. Bosniak leaders decided to go ahead and bury them in the local Kozarac cemetery, at Kamicani, which was legally owned by the Islamic community. The first few hundreds that were buried were unidentified, as DNA testing was not yet available, followed by those identified on the basis of clothes found in the mass graves.

At the time, we could not get a reasonable solution from the authorities. In other words, they would not allow a burial site. Hence we decided without asking for permit anymore, to bury our sehide, their remains, in our local cemeteries.

Sead Cirkin spoke to me about how dangerous it was to bury hundreds of remains in 1998. During the funeral procession, they had to bury the dead without much care for religious procedure, as local Serb villagers drove around shooting into the air, and sometimes in their direction. At the first two funerals, very few attended due to this intimidation. The funerals were mainly organised by men who had fought in the Bosnian Army. Afterwards, international organisations dealing with return, such as IFOR, realised that returnees were willing to return regardless of threats and perceived impracticalities, such as lack of accommodation (at the time, Prijedor housed large groups of Serb refugees from Croatia and displaced persons from the Federation) and other barriers. The idea gained ground that “once our dead remain, we shall return”, and mass funerals evolved into commemorative practices, where the returnee community paid a visit to the cemetery twice a year in the months of May and July. Thus, the roots of current practice are about return and re-establishing the community, as much as they are about individual and collective memorialisation.

124 On the contested nature of memorialisation concerning war heroes and victims in the post war construction of national memory, see an insightful work by Hoenik Kwon (2006) on rituals regarding the massacre in My Lai. It took thirty years for families of the dead, and only after change of regime, to be able to mark the graves and create a cemetery.

The religious dimension of funeral practice

There is a striking level of conformity with the religious dress code at the funerals, although it is important to note that these ceremonies are attended by a far wider group than the religious community of practicing Muslims. I have attended the procession for the last five years, and as a Bosnian Muslim myself, have felt unease at times during the visit to the cemetery. I was well aware that many people might disapprove of my resistance to covering my head, as my closest friend pointed out in May 2011. On the other hand, on our route to the cemetery, our common acquaintances wanted me to take a photograph of their fancy Muslim dress, behaving as though they have acquired national folk costume for a fancy dress party. Others fished for compliments in the way they dressed their head scarves and did their make-up. Of course, old people, more accustomed to the Bosnian way of Islam, wear modest long dresses and “*shamiya*” (a head scarf decorated with silver or string ornaments), which are consistent with the appropriate dress code for attending a funeral before the war. The latter often complained about the inappropriate and imported dress code that the younger generations wore, but were nevertheless content to see diaspora communities observing at least some elements of the costume.

The desire by many to reiterate their Muslim identity in the postwar life of Kozarac is closely associated with their direct experiences of suffering during the ethnic cleansing, when they were persecuted or tortured on the basis of being a Muslim. During the camps, Serb guards targeted inmates whose way of dressing or talking would suggest a Muslim identity. A green coloured top would be regarded as provocative, and many owners of such tops were tortured or killed. There is an infamous story of a man being beaten to death after instinctively responding to a guard using the polite (Muslim) expression “*bujrum*,” and this has become part of a shared collective memory, often narrated by survivors and their relatives. One day, inmates were sitting in rows on the *pista* (a stretch of tarmac in front of one of the buildings in Omarska camp), and an inmate was eating a small piece of bread that he had saved in his pocket after lunch, as they were only given three minutes to enter the canteen and eat. A guard passed by and said “bon appetit,” and he replied “*bujrum*”, meaning “you’re welcome”. He did not manage to digest that small piece of bread before several of them began beating him

brutally; half an hour later he fell into a sitting position and a witness recalled the image of the now dead man being dragged in front of inmates whilst the piece of bread fell from his mouth.

Some people see the focus on martyrs' cemeteries and mass burials as an explicitly political response to the attempt to destroy their community, and so they should not be viewed as only religious rituals. In fact, it is true to say that religious connotations and symbolism, such as dress code, have permeated other social and cultural customs, beyond just religious events. However, it is worth noting that a small but visible number of younger people have genuinely found practicing religion a useful way to manage and make sense of their experiences, and to strengthen the Bosniak component of their Bosnian identity.

Since July 1998, mass funerals of those identified or discovered in the preceding twelve months have developed a consistent theme in that religious and political leaders give speeches at the event on the importance of not forgetting. I have attended the last three funerals. Each year, a procession of coffins carried by male members of families is arranged in a different location, usually a small returnees' village which is chosen as a central focus of the ceremony (*centralna ceremonija*). Coffins are laid out in a field, each covered with a green cloth. Before the official ceremony begins, many mourners walk around the coffins looking for a name of their kin so as to stay closer to them during their communal prayer. Some recall or contemplate their own sense of mortality and how they too could have been among them. One can observe children as young as two years old standing beside their mother or a grandmother, bending over the coffin or embracing it. These bodies each have histories, and each is in a way the mirror image of those who survived. Hence the display of the coffins remind the living of the blurred line between them and their dead, creating a sense of their destinies being bound together. A dais is constructed at the front, where Imams, Parish Priests, community leaders and the Bosniak religious leader, Reis Mustafa Ceric¹²⁵ each give speeches about the need to remember the events of the summer of 1992, and "how each year our

¹²⁵ Over the years of funeral orations, the local community has grown impervious to speeches given by Sarajevo leaders, as they see no direct help from the government. In fact, many view the political establishment in Sarajevo as equally indifferent toward their communal life in RS as the RS officials.

dead remind us and warn us not to forget the injustice done to us”. Other politicians stand beside them, but do not usually speak on these occasions, at least since the public criticism of the 2005 funeral. Several prominent local individuals have criticised the organisers for paying too much attention to whom they invite from the political establishment, at the expense of the experience of those that matter - the families of the missing:

A funeral board in Prijedor...has made, collective farewell to innocent victims murdered in 1992, into agony. On an extremely hot day, without any sun protection, we had to stand an hour and twenty minutes, and listen to a parade of speakers. Without any concern or respect towards elderly and sick, they kept giving their speeches. My mother felt sick and we had to go home instead of attending a proper funeral for my neighbours and friends at the martyrs' cemetery...¹²⁶



Speeches at a funeral near Kozarac, 2009

126 Ramulic, E. 28 June, 2005. on local website www.mojprijedor.com

A central part of the ceremony is the reading of the names of the victims, performed by children whose relatives are being buried. In recent years, the Serb mayor of Prijedor, Marko Pavic, has usually also made a short appearance. Returnees generally perceive politicians with suspicion, saying that they are “only here to score some votes”. After the speeches, there is a collective prayer for all martyrs (*zajednicko klanjanje dzenaze*), and then each village takes their dead to their local cemetery (*mezarje*). Depending on the distance travelled, and the weather, they either carry them on foot or in a van followed by a convoy of cars guarded by police. A final prayer is then performed before the burial, conducted by a local Imam at the cemetery.

Some scholars have claimed that Bosnian Muslim death rituals, which provide a shared experience of bereavement, are an important ingredient in “calming down” the grief and reinforcing a sense of communal belonging (Verdery 1999, Bringa 1995, Stover, 2002). This certainly was the feeling of pre-war communities, regardless of religious affiliations, as neighbours were always keen to share the burden and help a family to deal with loss. Traditionally, forty days after the burial, *tehvid* is organised by the family of the deceased, where neighbours, friends and family join in collective prayers, eating and talking, whilst sharing a sense of loss of a member of the community¹²⁷ (Bringa, 1995 Stover, 2002). At these mass funerals, however, one can observe familial grief being shared but not necessarily the same level of communal grief. This is partly due to the radical transformation of demographic structures of the community in which many individuals have not resided in the same specific physical site of “home” for some time, and thus there is a lack of shared life.

As soon as the burial is over, another form of social interaction begins: the search for the living amidst the dead. Although the funeral ritual is generally acknowledged as the saddest event of the year, many mourners anticipate an encounter with an old friend or a relative that has been out of touch since the war. On these occasions, in the cemetery, one would take a photograph of such encounters to capture the image in case they never meet again. Scarves are often removed at this point to aid recognition. I recall a meeting

¹²⁷ Interestingly, for the mass funeral in July 2011, and the burial of an engineer, Zlatko Bsirevic, his family put an obituary in Kozarski Vjesnik, the local Prijedor newspaper that played a divisive role in creating enmity and encouraging violence in the camps, for example. It read “this picture should remind your friends that left you there [Omarska]”

of two women relatives who, during the prayer, were constantly gazing at each other, unsure whether they recognised each other. When the religious ceremony ended, one cried out: “take off your scarf to see if it is really you.”

Hannah Arendt (1994) has written about a phenomenon of always being ready to leave - a precariousness of home for those from whom it was forcibly taken - and how that has an impact on the future attachment and relationships. My findings have also drawn me to the precariousness of social relationship that emerge after violence. Human suffering on such magnitude seems to reduce our capacity for attachment to another human being or place, whilst reinforcing links among the “community of sufferers” that shared a life in the past. Hence, a shared moment of joy in such a meeting is rarely frowned upon by the community, despite the funeral context. In fact, one could argue that the social aspect of the funerals, especially for individuals in the diaspora who seek a familiar face in the crowd, is an important part of the ritual. The significance of a “face” is also illuminated in the way children or a young child of the dead are approached. Relatives of the dead, in meeting his or her child after a decade or more, often burst into tears whilst searching for resemblances to their lost one in the child’s face. It is a painful and joyful moment of the encounters between former friends, neighbours or relatives, in which past and present collide. Those moments are filled with brief exchanges of their experiences of life in exile and their families’ situations, followed by an exchange of contact details. There is a particular sense in which these conversations seem to acquire deeper meanings for all involved, as though some form of social repair takes place even if it is momentary.



Mass funeral near Kozarac, 2006

The Memory of Bones

*We came to visit you today [martyrs] but also to remind ourselves of the 24th of May 1992. Allah made you sehidi (martyrs), that is witnesses, to witness the crimes that happened to this people. So that your names and these white tombstones become indelible traces of criminals' deeds, which were undertaken by our yesterdays' neighbours and godfathers. Allah showed mercy upon you and made you an indelible proof whilst leaving us to carry emanet of truth. To talk about you, to teach our children about your suffering and death...So that we never and nowhere forget you. How honourably we carry that emanet, we ask you now?*¹²⁸

"They returned to die." (Serb youth in Prijedor, July, 2007)

Apart from the religious undertones of funeral practices, the speeches are often intended to warn returnees of their duty to the dead and to memory. A local Imam might speak of "our burden of the past", of the need not to forget, and warn those who stray away from these memories that "we will suffer again" if they do so. Through the funeral process, the mortal remains (*posmrtni ostaci*), the bodies (*tijela*) are given back a personal identity, but also a collective one - that of *sehidi* (martyrs). In short, they are reunited with their living community and the living are informed of the importance that *sehidi* hold, and reminded of the duties that are passed onto them (*emanet*)¹²⁹.

It is well documented that in the post-Holocaust period, the families of the dead and individuals who lost their entire families often focused their life on creating a new one (Danieli, 1985). Some scholars claimed it to be a natural human need to recreate in the midst of extreme loss. In such cases, newborns would often be named after those who had vanished. This is also evident among dispersed Bosniak communities, but it is not widespread - in fact, there is some anecdotal evidence, according to both locals and diaspora alike, that Bosniaks residing abroad tend to avoid giving Muslim names to

¹²⁸ <http://kozarac.ba/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=3065>

¹²⁹ One could argue these speeches resemble classical funeral orations, or poems dedicated to the dead or historical speeches, in which some kind of a dialogue between the dead and the living is mediated ensuring that the living understand the sacrifices made by the dead (cf. Hemingway's "On the American Dead in Spain"). However, it is important to note variations in people's expression of the "duty of memory" as they are culturally constructed.

their children, for various reasons¹³⁰. Nonetheless, the sense of duty, communally expressed, is in the way one carries his or her *emanet*, given by the martyrs. According to some of my informants, *emanet* is understood as a spiritual inheritance. It has religious and cultural connotations of a duty transmitted or left by the dead for the living to carry on, on their behalf, be it in their jobs, ways of life, learning or wisdom. For example, several friends of mine have either returned or got involved in NGOs dealing with the missing as a sense of duty towards their fathers who have been murdered. Some who have lived in Prijedor before the war, returned not to the city of Prijedor but to the small town of Kozarac. I asked a woman why she did not return to her original home, and her response was “my father’s birthplace is Kozarac, and he always loved this place so I returned for him”.

Individuals from the community who were executed have been given a status of “holy innocence”, as they are perceived to have been targeted not for their (imagined) crimes but because of their religious affiliation alone. As a result, a particular sense of duty, that of being entrusted to keep Bosnia alive in the predominantly Serb entity of RS¹³¹, permeates communal life. “They entrusted us” is an often-used vernacular in various social actions pertaining to memory and reconstruction of social life at present. This discourse is particularly explicit during the time when local or national politics set discernible boundaries for memory, justice and social recovery. Just as the images of the missing were used by soldiers of the 17th brigade during their battles as a vehicle for motivation, so too the dead are seen as the communal guardians in all fields of social action, and are central to all practices of “memory-justice” (Booth, J., 2001). Common perceptions of “being invisible” or a marginalised community within the wider affairs of the local social and political activities during most of the year, is transcended on the annual days of remembrance and funeral practices. In those days, a shared emotionality is reiterated among members of the community (Bar-Tal, 2007).

130 See the kozarac.ba forum on Bosniak names. Some scholars have explored changes that occurred in the identity of Bosnian Muslims ensuing from the experience of the war and emmigration at a time when much of Western media was permeated with discourses on “Islamic Extremism,” asserting that all identities are socially constructed and permeable by various social and historical processes of the time (cf. Cicak-Cand, 1999, Kalcic, 2005)

131 For an interesting anthropological analysis of “debts to the dead” and how the living are placed within “an historical landscape created by the dead”, see Graebar’s “Painful memories”, 1997. Others too have written on the notion of return of a vengeful, aggrieved dead who has not been properly buried (Kwon, 2008, Perera, 2001)

In such an emotional climate,¹³² where the socio-political context continues to marginalise the returnee community, it is not surprising that these burial rituals have become a major preoccupation of communal life. Despite these intimate communal rituals, the denial of the crimes exemplified in the political discourse of the local Serb politicians has not only limited public expression of grief, but also affected the community's ability to fully mourn their loss. In turn, this has impinged upon any possibility of social recovery. Paradoxically, the solidarity of the "community of mourners"¹³³, demonstrated through rituals of death, actually create an image that "there is life in Kozarac" after all. Given the fact that the dead occupy the central position in most of social activities, any communal action where many participate regardless of "temporary residence abroad" shows that "there are people" (*ima nas jos*) and they are not going away.

Over time, returnees have begun to realise their own vulnerability within RS. And, although they might not agree that life in Kozarac will again end, as some Serb neighbours foretell, they have begun to contemplate how to ensure that historical or objective traces of their own existence remain. They want to create public as well as private memory of their experience. There is a common belief among prominent members of the community, both local and the diaspora, that the past continues to exist only by means of recitation. This creates a burden for succeeding generations, who are expected to carry forward this memory by narration, the written word and any other means of communication that will ensure the past will not be forgotten. However, some Bosniaks remain concerned that their community is too likely to forget, and they are

132 de Rivera defines emotional climate as the shared emotions of a group as a result of a society's response to its sociopolitical conditions. These emotions do not necessarily need to be a product of direct experiences of individuals. A number of scholars have explored relationship between emotion and culture in the post-conflict societies. The idea is that by evaluating a social context, rituals that invoke a particular set of shared emotions, besides enriching our understanding of dynamics of societal processes, would illuminate an emotional orientation of a society or community. In turn, it would give us an opportunity to change or transform, for example, a negative emotional climate by changing its context. However, some recognise that recovery of (positive) emotional climate is a challenge in a society that has been greatly weakened or radically transformed (cf. Bar-Tal & Helperin, De Rivera, 2007). For empirical studies on emotional climates and (in)ability to transform negative emotions resulting from the effects of mass violence on individuals and policies of impunity that often continue long after the conflict cease, see, for example, Miller, K.E. & Rasmussen, A. (2009).

133 Katherine Verdery (1999), examining the reburial of bones from WW2 in Yugoslavia, noticed how these rituals, visceral in character, can be manipulated in creating and redressing communal belonging.

starting to ask what happens once the missing are all located and buried? Without the annual funerals and speeches on the importance of not forgetting, how can memory best be preserved? These very emotionally charged practices have acted as “deep memories” that are embodied in an individual and communal sense of a shared past, and as such have been regarded as an objectified manifestation of the past. Langer has written on the significance of these “deep memories” as being representative of “durational time”, a time that “relentlessly stalks the memory of the witness” (1995, 22). Apprehensive for the future, at the 2009 funeral, some leaders declared that the reason for the slow process of identification of the remaining thirteen hundred missing people is not due to Sarajevo politicians, or a lack of interest towards the suffering of Prijedor’s Bosniaks, but rather because these gatherings to bid farewell to “our *sehidi* [are] a way to face ourselves as, and if it was not for these funerals, we would have already forgotten. Like this, we are always reminded” - the implication being that *sehidi* and/or God’s will is choosing for us not to bury all the victims in order to evade the inevitable - collective amnesia among the victims.

Kamicani Cemetery: “Our best memorial”

Due to the wartime leaders’ decision, taken in the early days of return, to bury the dead in their local cemetery in Kamicani, this site has gradually been accepted among community members as “our best memorial”. When the Kamicani cemetery was chosen as a martyrs’ graveyard, most people felt disconcerted as it was not as central as they would have liked it to be:

We looked for a spacious location and close to the main road as our victims deserve a place that would often be visited... We have a partisan’s cemetery on a very central and beautiful location... At the time, we were disappointed that we had to choose a site that is hidden from the main road. To us, it looked, then, as though we had to bury our sehide in a corner, somewhere where no one can see them.

Over the years, the cemetery was constructed and expanded as a memorial to the dead, and as such “needed to be seen”. As luck would have it, the local urban plan has ensured the “visibility” of the cemetery that accommodates nearly a thousand victims, since local Serbs who travel to their villages in the vicinity of Mount Kozara, or tourists

visiting the National Park, will now have to pass by the cemetery thanks to a new bypass road:

However, at present, that all looks very different. It was Allah's will that all turned the way it did for our benefit. So, for example, with the new urban plan, a road in front of the cemetery will become a bypass road. This happening has ensured that it will not happen what was planned ...

Thus the cemetery is understood to play a central role in the collective imagination of suffering of the community and in the safeguarding of memory:

Our generations remember, but we would like, in the future, when new generations visit this graveyard... When they see a large number of "nisana" (tombstones), that should tell them something. What happened to this people? What have they done? Who did this? When you see so many nisana, every tombstone is a person that tells you quite enough.

As scholars of World War One have noted, the significance of the names and tombstones as "markers of the graves" (Laqueur, 1993) is partly that they express, visually, what a large number of men looks like, but also, as the Imam implied, each tombstone has a history to tell¹³⁴. More importantly, for the families of the dead, inscribed names of the victims represent an objectified recognition that these men existed¹³⁵. A walk around the cemetery, reading the names of the victims, with their birthdate inscribed on the uniformly white tombstones, with a crescent and a star above the name to illuminate their religious affiliation shows that many were born in the late 1960s or 1970s, but all have a common year of death: 1992. This gives an impression of the scale of violence that took place in the summer of 1992. Many relatives, especially children and their parents, are buried next to each other, even though they were often

134 Interesting to note that, for example, for some families and women of Srebrenica, the priority was to establish a memorial in Potocari first, whilst identification of individuals was of second importance (Stover, 2002). This, of course, is not to say that each mother was not interested in finding remains of her sons, but rather that they wanted to make their presence felt (through the dead), and their loss acknowledged in RS, as many continue to reside in the Federation. In contrast, for the inhabitants of Kozarac, return was envisaged as a step in reversing the results of ethnic cleansing; however, a struggle against denial continues and therefore commemorative acts and narratives of loss are, in part, an expression of grief.

135 An interview with "Mothers of Kozarac" for a Bosnian Television documentary on "Hronika Krajsnickih Gradova", asserts that for those whose children have not been identified, having their name put on a memorial is a way of marking their existence (27th of March, 2010).

found in different mass graves and at a different time. Families of the missing would ask the Islamic Association of Kozarac, the guardian of the cemetery, to keep a place next to their kin already buried, whilst hoping to hear that another relative is identified. So when a visitor comes to the cemetery, an image of parents and children buried next to each other evokes a story of obliteration of a family as a vital unit of communal life.

The Twentieth Century has seen a burgeoning of acts of commemoration and war memorials. After the First World War, families searched for the graves of fallen soldiers across the Western Front, resulting in the construction of cemeteries on a large scale on the sites of battles. This was the beginning of a new age of memorials, where victims were registered, named and buried in individual graves (Winter, 1998). Cemeteries were often constructed on the lines of battlefields, and fallen soldiers from overseas were not permitted to be taken home. Uniform grave stones were built. At home, they were remembered in the erection of “unknown soldier” memorials, depicting a loss of all victims through a single statue. Nevertheless, the meaning of war memorials changes over time so, for example, decades later, many families wished to bring their sons back to their villages and towns’ cemeteries. For others, unsurpassable physical distance, as in the case of Australians who lost their lives at Gallipoli, meant their families had to be contented with burials at the site of battle (Hannaford & Newton, 2008). However, “home” was brought to them by the exploration of physical landscapes of both countries, searching for their similarities, growing native Australian plants in the cemeteries, transplanting the soil of Gallipoli to Australia and so forth. This endeavour meant that symbolic links were made between the two countries. However, it is the rise of the pilgrimage to Gallipoli by young Australian backpackers since the 1990s that has ensured the representation of Gallipoli as a “cultural centre”, where the Anzac Remembrance Day celebrates the sacrifices of the dead as “the birth of a nation”. In essence, these journeys to the cemeteries at Gallipoli become an expression of new ways of mourning constituted in “secular spirituality”. Many visitors, encouraged by tour guides, participate in retracing steps of their ancestors or young fallen soldiers. The experience of this journey even from the start back home in Australia was anticipated by many as a “sensory and embodied” one (Hannaford & Newton, 2008).

For many Kozarac diaspora communities, a visit to Kamicani cemetery on the annual day of mass funeral has become just such a sacred pilgrimage. Many arrange their annual holidays so as to be present at the funeral:

You reminded me, how, for us Kozarcani, every year (in comparison to others who attend happy anniversaries)...we, every year, attend funerals. People find it unusual when you, months ahead, say that you are busy at that particular time because you are going to a funeral. First question, how do you know that a funeral will take place so far ahead...and then, you explain, they have no word of reply...

Contemporary Kozarac is a community shaped by loss, and where grief continues to be a driving force for cultural and political construction of memory and identity. On a communal level, visits to the cemetery, days of remembrance and funeral rites support the need to create their own historicised sense of self and their losses - a “register of sacred history” both forward and backward looking. For example, Kozarac Imam Mahic’s recent discovery of a historical site of a burial chamber, in the vicinity of the Kamicani cemetery and dating back to the Ottoman period, gives an additional historical context to the cemetery:

...I started talking about it a year ago...We are pleased that the sehidsko mezarje (martyrs’ cemetery) is indeed in this place, for a number of reasons. We have a historical monument, a burial chamber (turbeh) built in 1713, which is only three hundred meters from the cemetery. During the Ottoman period, there was a battle when the local population defended Kozarac. At that time, a traveller arrived, an unknown individual, who lost his life on this site. In his honour, the turbeh was built because he was a sehid too who was defending his place... Perhaps it is good, historically, that [the present cemetery] is not far away...We will build a turbeh for our contemporary sehide, we will write all their names on it. And, that old one is near by... [it was] God’s will to be in the same setting.



Bosnian funeral practice, Kozarac

Chapter 4: Imposed Reconciliation and The Project to Commemorate the Former Camp of Omarska

As part of the growing desire among the returnee population to see some form of public memory that acknowledges their recent past, and the suffering and loss it entailed, survivors of the camps have sought to commemorate these sites. But whereas Kamicani and even the local monument were bottom-up initiatives controlled by the local returnee community, more ambitious forms of memorialisation have required the involvement of a wider group of stakeholders. In the following chapter, through a thick description of a specific case, I will examine how a failed process to construct a memorial to the Omarska camp, under a framework of externally-imposed reconciliation, set back survivors' hopes for public recognition and led to discord among local groups.

The Omarska project was intended to be a mediation initiative based on bringing enemies around a common table, seeking a solution that would suit all parties, which was influenced by both traditional communal practices in African societies' restoration of social equilibrium (Gluckman, 1968) and modern European dispute resolution through conciliation commissions. The failure of the project illustrates several interesting aspects of the social dynamics between survivor or 'victim' communities and well-intentioned external players, whose intervention raises hopes and expectations that cannot always be fulfilled. It also demonstrates the limits and some pitfalls of an approach based on recent thinking about the role of narratives as the main expression of memory, and in particular the danger of appropriating survivors' narratives without due consideration for the victims' own personal psychological needs. As a result, in this case, the failed process had a significant negative effect on the victims' confidence to act in concert for the benefit of their community.

I will argue that the inability of the mediators to engage with a wider body of survivors, their ignorance of basic postwar environmental factors, and ultimately the manner in which a selected representative group of survivors was treated all suggest that we need

to re-evaluate how victims' needs are addressed in practice. The research on the healing power of story telling, exemplified in the South African Truth Commission's work and transplanted globally, seems to be lacking a critical examination of how these stories are (mis)used, and for whose benefit, when considering the interests of survivors' groups, foreign or national peace builders and individual victims themselves. In particular, we know little about how the telling affects the victims of violence in the long term after the gaze of media and mediators moves to another place of violence (Ross, 2003). The mere fact that all involved are keen to see peace and prosperity after a conflict does not warrant their participation as being unidimensional in their conduct or aspirations, nor are good intentions enough to guarantee a positive impact. Despite critical analysis of the psychological effects of story telling on the victim, in public or in court testimony, narratives continue to be the main focus of much work on memory. This is partly due to the last two decades of the twentieth century - the "empire of trauma" and memory studies that grew within social science, specifically its "universalisation of trauma" by various scholarly investigations (Fassin et al, 2009). Also, the idea of "healing social wounds" has been primarily framed within western conceptual understanding of psychological recovery of the individual, the eighties invention of Post Traumatic Syndrome and subsequent development of international humanitarian interventions in various cultures without much consideration of the local understanding of healing and recovery (Summerfield, 2002).

I will look at the trajectory of the community's struggle to commemorate the site of the former camp at the Omarska iron mine, and move on to examine a particular "window of opportunity" resulting from the acquisition of the iron ore mine by the global multinational company Mittal Steel, which resulted in the establishment of a UK-run mediation project. I will unpack the concept of the victim as the central factor in reconciliation, and look at how the mediators treated victims in pursuing a high-profile mediation success story, and how they were viewed by the local Serb authorities and the "perpetrator" group in general. Key questions here include how the victim is understood conceptually, for what purpose "their stories" are employed by the teller, and in which context are they expressed and received? What kind of audience is asked to or is willing to listen? What are the reactions and roles of the listeners? Also, what can this tell us about the politics of reconciliation and power relations therein? I contend that

ultimately, reconciliation, as one aspect of social recovery, is an ongoing process and can only be encouraged by outsiders, but not superficially or prematurely imposed. A very real problem with the “operational” side of reconciliation is that it is difficult to measure, and often fails to take into account existing, sometimes hidden processes of reckoning and reconciliation already underway on the ground. How can we encourage something that is hard to perceive and measure? I argue that to understand and evaluate reconciliatory processes on the ground, first of all, one has to observe the “doing” of the group, that is, the concrete actions taking place within their social life, rather than “the talking”. In that way, we can discern what actually matters to those involved, as any social recovery after violence has its own way of “getting on” or “dealing with the past” that needs to be taken into account, and is quite often simply not visible to those not intimately connected with the community in question.

Within the local realm of Kozarac, reconciliation is rarely discussed. It is only present when foreign visitors inquire about it, or when it is required to be mentioned in NGO funding applications. However, that does not mean that people are not concerned about future social relations between communities. For many, social reparation begins within individual and local attempts to ensure that their home is a safe and prosperous place for the future. Relations with “the other” after conflict, especially with those perceived as the perpetrator group, are regarded as necessary meaningful, but possible only when one’s own community is capable to stand “on its own feet”. The process of reconciliation is understood as political, and it rests upon negotiation in which language is not necessarily the prime mode. When asked about reconciliatory processes, many will claim that they have “opened their arms towards the other side” by returning to live within the entity that committed the crimes, and which continues to negate their right to equal citizenship. Hence, the expectation is that the perpetrators’ side needs to show a degree of recognition, publicly, of the crimes that were committed, in order to begin dealing with the past. Fragmented social environments often navigate emotional and socio-political terrains that have no smooth edges, and thus complexities involved in the everyday interaction among former enemies may challenge our need to simplify motivation and actions that we encounter in the field. Observing various interactions among former enemies when dealing with jobs, shopping or schooling does not equate with “positive steps towards reconciliation” as some foreign observers and individuals

from the Office of the High Representative of the UN have remarked; these social activities are sometimes unavoidable, and sometimes mundane processes of a life that inevitably requires contact and communication between different groups. However, within the context of public opinion, in the region of Prijedor, the dominant paradigm is exemplified in Mayor Pavic's vision of "a better Prijedor for all its citizens" - a future-oriented town that aims to provide employment and social progress, and where, if one has to speak about the past, then the corresponding question is asked: "what about Serb victims in Sarajevo and other Bosniak-held territories?" In such a sociopolitical context, the growing gap between communities is often hard to discern at first, as indeed it appears that, compared to other Bosnian towns, Prijedor is an "oasis of multi-ethnic tolerance" as Pavic contends.

In order to understand the dynamics of broken connections or "ruins of the past", I utilise the concept of intersubjectivity as a primary methodological tool (Duranti, 2010). Given the socio-economic and political disparity among its participants, asymmetrical power relations yield a series of human relationships and interactions that struggle over the subjective position that determines whether one is perceived as an object or subject of the story. In post-violence society, these relations are both a preoccupation and a presupposition of many social actors; however, it is never entirely acknowledged, even though most of them are aware of it and sometime informally remark on their concern that prevailing narratives will be codified as historical truth. This is particularly salient within the returnee community surrounded by memorials and a dominant political discourse that almost entirely disregards their experience and denies them the right to shape the social and cultural production of the public memory or understanding of the war.

My work focuses on the returnee Bosniak community in the Kozarac region - a collective bound by their general sense of belonging to a "community of survivors". Examining the victims' sense of powerlessness, I have also tried to consider how this sense of "not being in control" can be deployed by individual "spokespersons" within the community as a source of empowerment in their dealing with foreign mediators. For example, the use of the label "*zrtva*", a victim, can have a different meaning and emphasis in different situations. A statement such as "*on je zrtva*" (he is a victim)

carries both wanted and unwanted overtones depending on the context and the subject's position, and the audience. Broadly speaking, there are two categories of analysis of survivors' testimonies that originated from the Holocaust survivor's trauma and impacted on other experiences of traumas (Tal, 1996). First of all, there has been a scholarly focus on the interpretation of traumatic stories narrated within the patient-therapist relationship by psychologists and psychiatrists. In the sixties, social movements for the rights of abused women or Vietnam war veterans argued that these groups be treated as victims in pursuit of wider, social interests and healing. Baring one's experience in public became a ritual in which the active audience could appropriate the experience - to "bear witness" - and thus become imbued with moral rights to right the wrong. In the act of narration, a testimony was born that needed to be interpreted or objectified in memorial practices in order to lay the experience to rest in the past perfect sense (Young, 1994). On the other hand, for example, Holocaust survivors' autobiographical works are permeated with stories of human cruelty and suffering conveying the incomprehensible nature of the experience for an audience that, on the whole, has not gone through it, resulting in a frustration emanating from the inability to share the experience with the outside world (Levy, 1989, Delbo, 1995, Hukanovic, 1996). And yet, story telling continues to be the most used form of traumatic memory (Brockmeier, 2002), be it as a form of healing or to share one's trauma in a world that has become obsessed with the perceived victimhood of ourselves and others. To mould the story to become comprehensible, all kinds of metaphorical investigations and meanings have been explored; and in the process, the experience has been "mythologised" or standardised in order to "fix the floating chain of signifieds" (Barth in Tal, 1996). As much as in public, this practice is generated in Truth Commissions that set out to reveal the truth and reconcile society after violence in International and National Courts, focusing on fact-telling and recording testimonies intended to have a wider positive effect on the local communities emerging from the conflict.

But what happens to the victim after the story has served a particular purpose? How can we measure our initial hopes and claims of healing and social reconstruction? These questions are rarely investigated in a detailed manner. However, there are critical works that have noticed victim groups' sense of humiliation, misunderstanding, loss of control

over their story and ultimately, the feeling of being abandoned. I shall explore these through the story of one such mediation project, and then, looking at the aftermath of the failed process, consider how justice and healing might look like if the victims were consulted and were in charge of social change.

In my MRes thesis, I looked at how returnees sought some kind of acknowledgment of their suffering and loss from former Serb neighbours. At the core of this need was the idea of recognition for loss and suffering needing to be acknowledged as a necessary step towards some form of renewed coexistence, understood as an active, engaged way of life rather than just living side by side, as is the case in most parts of post-war Bosnia today. I explored the fact that many felt “being among their own families and Bosniak neighbours” was the right way to reclaim a “normal life” in which one is no longer a refugee, a victim or a survivor, but rather a person with history and presence shared and noticed by others. But such acknowledgement is always partial as it does not involve the former “other” part of the community - the perpetrator group. As we saw, return was always imagined as a way of reversing ethnic cleansing, but also as a way to return to the self. Debasement suffered in the war and a sense of uprootedness heightened in the experience of exile had mobilised many to actively seek the restoration of their previous life. Such a process, of course, demanded an acknowledgment by former friends, work colleagues, neighbours, and in some cases family members to “see” their coming home in the light of belonging to the same community. In contrast to much prevalent discourse on post-conflict social relations understood as fixed enemies, then, returnees wanted essentially to be accepted by their former community members. Until recently, this sense of actively seeking to be reintegrated in a wider community had not been explicitly stated and acted upon. Looking back at the former Bosnian commander Sead Cirkin’s conscious decision to try to understand the emotional and political world of their Serb counterparts during the negotiation of return, we can perhaps see the roots of this phenomenon. Cirkin was well aware that new identities were formed in the conflict, in which “all suffered and lost in one way or another,” and that for those “on the other side” who needed to make decisions about allowing previous citizens to return home, there were difficult choices to be made. Above all, how were they to explain to the masses that fought for a new social order based on forcibly removing those who now want to return, that they were coming back and intended to stay?

Identity-building continues well after war is over, and this is particularly noticeable in regions where a large group of people was mobilised for violence against other members of their previous community in order to create new social structures and a new sense of belonging. In these instances, people feel a strong need to guard new boundaries created by the conflict, and keep the “enemy” at bay (Todorov, 2010). As long as former neighbours are regarded as strangers in relation to their own newly built community, the legacy of the nationalists’ actions is seen as protected. Furthermore, as the nationalists’ war aims were consolidated and legalised in the founding of two separate political entities within Bosnia-Herzegovina, they saw there was no going back to the way things were before, which further increased hostility towards returnees. The widespread denial of war crimes has, over the last decade, solidified the existence of a social world consisting of two quite distinct communities that share a degree of physical intimacy but are set apart by the apparent “collective amnesia” on one side and a perceived obsession with the past on the other. This has led to an unwillingness to allow returnees to be integrated in the new social order, exemplified by Serb citizens’ active deployment of threats, both physical and symbolic, such as writing the name of Omarska on a survivor’s apartment door, or direct conversations in which the same individual was asked “what is it that we need to do to you for you to understand you are not welcome here?” Meanwhile, monuments and ceremonies celebrating “Serb heroes” who fought for “*otadžbina*” (the fatherland) have become the main public tributes to the recent war. It is precisely because of such an environment that the Hague Tribunal has become a vital institution in the way that it ensures an historical record of war crimes is available when more Serbs are eventually ready to engage with their recent past. In the absence of other opportunities to commemorate or recall the crimes of the war and ethnic cleansing, returnees have fallen back on the undeniable evidence of their experience: the dead. Funerals and funerary practice were the only public forum available to returnees for commemorating their experience, and so have become a central pillar of public memory among survivors. Funerals and days of remembering are the only permitted means of collectively recalling suffering and publicly declaring “they have not forgotten” the recent past.

In such a context, following a decade of life lived in segregation, with two divided communities having their own way of remembering and representing the recent past,

how can peace builders attempt to reconnect and bring people together to find a mutually-acceptable solution to the need for a memorial at Omarska?

On Collective Remembrance of the Camp

At the end of the war, spontaneous return marked the beginning and, arguably, the end of any strategic planning by the “community of dispossessed”, who sought to act together in staking a territorial claim to their home town. Since then, events have largely been shaped by individual’s attempts to garner some kind of a collective experience based on a shared sense of marginalisation within the socio-political environment. The only practice that remains a cohesive activity among members of the Kozarac community is the act of remembering.

On May 24th 1999, local women of *Srcem do Mira*, supported by British friends from the Hazelwood women’s network, entered Kozarac to begin an annual ritual of tree-planting to mark the anniversary of the attack on the town. This was later extended to become an annual event, including a conference and visits to the sites of former camps at Omarska and Trnopolje. On the same day, the majority of engaged citizens of Kozarac visit the cemetery at Kamicani, where the majority of their dead are buried. But on August 6th every year, the annual visit to the Omarska camp commemorates the day in 1992 when the camp officially closed, and the whole community is united in a convoy of dozens of cars that set off from Kozarac to visit the mine. In the early years, people were only able to stand outside the main gate and look across at the mine buildings where over three thousand people were incarcerated in 1992, as cows grazed on the fields around the buildings. The tarmac between the large hangar building and the small notorious white house, where hundreds of prisoners lay all day long in the hot summer days of 1992 witnessing torture and killings, seemed a lot smaller than some of the survivors had remembered, with its broken surface and emerging weeds. But the blood stains could still be seen on unpainted walls nearby. On these visits, the buildings would act as part of the survivors’ sensory landscape, from which they recall the events of 1992 and the people they lost here. On their return home, the convoy of cars would pass through the village of Omarska, where, in the first few years, they would encounter verbal aggression and occasional stone-throwing. On one occasion, they were

intercepted by a Serb wedding procession, and as the convoy passed by, people were hit with bottles and the butts of guns that are traditionally shot into the air during wedding celebrations. Later, survivors would be allowed into the mine complex itself, but with various restrictions in place about which buildings they could visit. Now, the annual event is well-established, with accompanying media and dignitaries pointing to the symbolic importance of Omarska as a site of memory central to the experience of non-Serbs in north-west Bosnia.



Convoy preparing for the trip to Omarska

I first visited Omarska in 2006, joining a convoy of over a hundred cars that set out from the centre of Kozarac to visit the (now re-opened) mine. As we approached the Omarska complex, the stillness and quietness in the air was only interrupted by the sound of a conveyor belt. A survivor in the car remarked how some prisoners spent days on this conveyor belt, beaten, their skin scorched by the sun, in their last moments of life. The once deserted buildings, such as the hangar, now housed machinery, and workmen who continued working, creating much noise during the visit by survivors, many of whom had brought their children to show them where their fathers and relatives had been held. As we stood in the centre of the hangar, a survivor began to recall his experience during incarceration. Several policemen stood around us to ensure the group did not enter restricted areas of the building, which had resumed its prewar function as offices above the hangar. There was a minor confrontation, and after an emotional debate, some survivors broke the yellow tape that prevented them accessing the first floor rooms in which many used to sleep in the summer of 1992. Several policemen tried to remind them that this was a working area, and they were not allowed to enter, but to no avail. Everybody rushed forward, albeit in a relatively calm and orderly way, to view the rooms in which they or their loved ones had suffered. Passing along the narrow corridor, squeezed tight between the narrow walls, survivors and their families, who now lived all round the world, glanced at one another in the hope of seeing a familiar face. It was an emotionally charged experience, with survivors eagerly pouring out memories of their experience of this place, often to children brought up in the diaspora, as their allotted visiting time ran out, all the time surrounded by Serb police and mine workers that created echoes of 1992.

Apart from the homage to those who died in Omarska, the annual visit to the site of the former camp, gives the survivors and their families an opportunity to bind their stories, told so many times in exile, onto a specific, physical site of memory:

Satko Mujagic knows that tarmac well: his two-year-old daughter now plays with a ball on the very spot where he had been too weak to line up for bread because of dysentery, and had to be supported by his father. Later, the child picks a daisy. "You do this where your father lay bleeding," says one of the party. "Being here gives me the feeling of understanding nothing," says Satko. "The violence here was nothing to do with anything, not even war. It is unfathomable."

Young Sebiha Jakupovic, her face contorted with grief, stares around the rooms in a building called the White House from which hardly anyone emerged alive; her husband Alem was among those who perished. "I have a 12-year-old now," she says quietly, "just a baby at the time." (Vulliamy, 2004)

These days, each visit ends with a public gathering in front of the hangar, where a survivor or an NGO representative reads out the names of war criminals who are still at large, and those who have been tried and served their sentences. Then, as every year, there is a public plea for help from the local authority to support them in finding their missing relatives, and a call for a permanent memorial to the camp on the site of the mine. In the last couple of years, prominent politicians from Sarajevo would also join, asserting the need and duty to commemorate this place of horror. In addition, since the mine is now majority-owned by a multinational company, a few foreign and Bosnian journalists cover the event. Ed Vulliamy, the Guardian journalist who entered the camp in August 1992, gives a speech every year in which he claims that the place is a “sacred land” for Bosniaks and ought to be commemorated appropriately. His attendance is always highly emotionally charged as many survivors greet him as a hero for his dedication to a story that changed his life back in 1992. Although the purpose of the event is to commemorate those who were killed at Omarska, inevitably the presence of foreign journalists leads to a scramble for the telling of emotional stories. The commemoration of the most brutal camp in Europe since the Second World War, where hundreds were murdered and thousands tortured, is allowed to last just a few hours, once a year, in a remote part of the Bosnian countryside, before the site is closed again to survivors and the families of those who perished there. The annual visit to Omarska is a reminder of an ongoing struggle over memory, exemplified by the consistent refusal by the local Serb authority to recognise Omarska as an important site of memory for Bosnia as a whole.



Ed Vulliamy addresses the crowd at Omarska, 2006



The White House at Omarska, 2006



Picture of the author during a minor confrontation in the hangar at Omarksa, 2006

Approaching Mittal Steel

When, in November 2004, Mittal Steel acquired a majority stake in the iron mine company “*Ljubija Rudnici*” in Prijedor, local returnees believed this would create an opportunity to finally commemorate the site, given the company’s commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility and the strength of its own international brand. A survivor now living in Holland, Satko Mujagic, and several other individuals and organisations, such as *Srcem do Mira* and *Izvor*, wrote to the new owner of the mine asking to be allowed to create a memorial on the site. It was a timid approach by a few individuals, but it represented the views and wishes of most survivors and families of the missing, who wanted to mark the place of their horror and ensure that the dead and their suffering would be remembered:

...to help heal the wounds of the survivors is to acknowledge what happened. That is why we are appealing to you to dedicate part of this special place to the memory of what happened there only 12 years ago... Your company owns a place with a legacy. Although you are not responsible for what happened there, I hope that you will look compassionately upon our request so that the past will never be forgotten. (Optimisti, 2004)

At the time, many anticipated 2005 would see a public acknowledgement of their ordeal in their own country, rather than in the distant land of Holland, where the Hague Tribunal was investigating war criminals from the region. The International Criminal Tribunal had done a great job of meticulously recording the testimonies and evidence relating to cases deemed to be representative of the war crimes that took place in Bosnia in 1992, which included cases relating to Omarska, Kozarac and Prijedor. But this had not managed to overcome the polarisation of memory among different groups, nor to prick the bubble of denial among Bosnian Serbs, who often regarded the Tribunal as a politically-motivated conspiracy against their new para-state Republika Srpska. The arrests of key war criminals from Prijedor, and the killing during attempted arrest of Simo Drljaca in 1997 all had a positive effect on the process of return. However, over the years, the court’s policy of reducing sentences based on co-operation meant some war criminals, often unrepentant, were able to come back to Prijedor, where Serb nationalists continue to govern. As a result, and despite the ICTY’s historical importance, some people felt that it had no immediate (positive) bearing on their

everyday life. There was a strong view among returnees that a memorial to the Omarska camp would be a far more useful and locally-relevant initiative - “a fantastic opportunity to tackle the past,” as one put it. Many discussed, both privately and in public online, ideas about the possible final shape of the memorial, and much of this discussion was caveated by a stated wish to not be too “demanding” or “insensitive” towards the Serb community that held a generally antagonistic view of the project. More importantly, despite the dominant perception that many Serbs would not support such a project, survivors were keen to state that, in the long term, they did not want a memorial which only Bosniak children would visit - they wanted to create an educational centre, which all school children would visit and learn from.

The Mediators: Soul of Europe

Mittal responded to this request by appointing a small British charity, Soul of Europe (SoE), which consisted of a former priest, Donald Reeves, and his colleague Peter Pelz to take the project forward. Their mandate was to work locally among all communities to achieve a solution that would “... create a process of mediation which would bring Bosniaks and Serbs together to agree on a compromise for the memorial” (Pelz, P. & Reeves, D. 2009:27) SoE felt themselves ideally suited to lead the project, but were aware that many challenges lay ahead. They had been involved in the former Yugoslavia since 2000, mostly working with religious leaders in Belgrade and Banja Luka. In talks with Mittal, they stressed their friendship with the Serbian Church in Banja Luka and its leaders whom, in the past, they had brought over to England for debates and inter-faith dialogue.¹³⁶

In their initial proposal, SoE (2005a) state that the mediation project “leaves consideration of the place, the type of memorial and those who should be remembered as a matter for debate.” In essence, the project never actually guaranteed to accede to the survivors request to be allowed to commemorate the specific site of the former camp, although this was never fully understood by those from the Kozarac community who gave their support to the initiative. Instead, SoE mediators highlighted three main factors to bear in mind during their involvement. First of all, the Kozarac community, as

¹³⁶ See SoE at <http://www.soulofeurope.org/the-process-for-the-omarska-memorial-project/>

the largest returnee community and the place that most strongly “demanded a memorial,” given the fact that “they had all been connected with the killing camps at Omarska, Keraterm”. Secondly, they needed to be conscious of the fact that some of the victims and perpetrators live in the vicinity of each other, and hence there was a continuation of the “harassment between Serbs and Bosniaks and vice versa”. Lastly, the Bosniak leader of the SDA party, Sulejman Tihic, has in the past claimed that Mittal is “mining in a graveyard” due to Mittal’s refusal to allow a search of the mine workings for the bodies of those who went missing at Omarska. They believed that the “collective trauma of Kozarac” and its inhabitants was something that needed to be carefully dealt with, whilst recognising that inter-ethnic incidents of harassment and violence continued. It was claimed that if the demand for a memorial were not addressed, the returnees “would make sure that it was not a “safe place” to work, thus affecting Mittal’s decision to restore the mines, which would help make this region prosperous”. Serbs, on the other hand, were seen as difficult players to bring to the table as they played a “role in depleting the region of its Non-Serb members”. Aware of the enormity of such a project, SoE declared that bringing together different ethnic groups to plan a memorial could form possibly the basis for a wider process of reconciliation in Bosnia.

A Framework of Mediation: Critical Yeast, not Critical Mass

SoE’s methods and strategies were seen as creating a "critical yeast" as opposed to a "critical mass" - a catalyst for a solution, rather than the solution itself (Pelz & Reeves, 2009:110). They began working with a core group comprising significant members of the communities involved, with the idea that these people would then influence the rest of their respective communities. There were supposed to be three stages to this process:

- (1) identify significant members of the communities,
- (2) organise round tables and workshops among the chosen members; and,
- (3) finally begin moving towards a memorial.

Whilst there were no “fixed sides” nor a fixed number of members allowed within these talks, in retrospect it became clear that certain individuals had been chosen to negotiate, whilst others were excluded by the mediators. Led by the perception that “trauma and devastation brought by violence in the region demands an opportunity for inhabitants to reconcile themselves,” mediators embarked on searching for respected members of local communities who could bring about change. However, “critical yeast” meant targeting either powerful or prominent members of the communities rather than approaching survivors or local activists. On the Serb side, they involved three Serb women from the mine’s management team and a former mine manager, who was in charge of the mine during the time of the camp, Boris Danovic, who acknowledged on several occasions that the mine vehicles, for example, had then been used for carrying bodies and digging mass graves.

Over the course of the mediation, SoE paid many visits to the most important man in Prijedor, Mayor Pavic, "the godfather of the town"(Ibid:47), and a defence witness at The Hague in the case of Milomir Stakic, the town's wartime mayor, who was sentenced to forty years imprisonment for his part in ethnic cleansing. They sought his approval, as they believed that his support for a memorial would mean that groups such as Serb war veterans would not raise their voice against it. Two other men who had been interrogators in the camp were also involved in the talks, which was regarded as an outrage by Bosniak participants. Among Bosniaks, there were three Omarska survivors: a former judge, Nusreta Sivac; a journalist and author of a book about Omarska, *The Tenth Circle of Hell*, Rezak Hukanovic; and a regional politician, Muharem Murselovic. The main interlocutor from Kozarac was Emsuda Mujagic from *Srcem do Mira*. Local managers of the project were also appointed: a young returnee, Anel (Murselovic’s nephew), and a Serb refugee from Croatia, Zoran, whom SoE hoped would work together to help build common purpose among the participants. They were given a supposedly neutral position, and it was hoped they would observe and mediate among those involved in the discussion at the workshops.

I have not met all of the Serb participants, but I got to know two initial participants, both of whom had a mixed ethnic background. Vedran, whose father, Mladen Grahovac, was one of the only individuals from the “perpetrator side” who publicly recognised the

crimes committed against Bosniaks in Prijedor. Mladen contended that the Dayton Accords legitimised the results of ethnic cleansing:

war perpetrators tailored the post-war peace and established the political parties now running the country. Prijedor is worse than Srebrenica because in Srebrenica the crimes were committed by the militia in one offensive. In Prijedor the process continued throughout the war, forty-three thousand being driven out and up to four thousand killed" (Dani, 2002)

Another young man, Sacha, also joined in support of building a memorial, but as the discussions evolved, he realised that they were to be equal partners alongside their Bosniak counterparts in deciding how and what kind of memorial ought to be built, and for whom. Both Vedran and Sacha soon left the group, as SoE notes, "because he [Vedran] became adamant that only victims should be allowed to decide on a memorial and that Serbs had no right to be involved" (Ibid:123). Conversely to Vedran and Sacha's perception of the project, Bosniak representatives appeared to have been given the impression that the mediators' job was primarily to help support them against what they regarded as the politics of discrimination present in most social and political dimensions of their life. There seemed to be an uncritical acceptance that the project existed for them on the basis that such a project ought to address the grievances of victims and, after all, they argued, it was a direct response to their request for Mittal's support for a memorial at the camp. This sense of ownership of the project among a small group of Bosniak representatives would later lead to a major struggle over who had the right to be involved among the victims.

Before we look at the experience of the survivors during the mediation process, it is worth noting how the project was handled on the ground. I was, unfortunately, unable to observe the process within the SoE round table discussions in Prijedor during the summer of 2005, as that part of the process was conducted prior to my fieldwork. However, I knew some of the Bosniaks involved in the project from my previous research, and I got to know others as the project evolved. I also joined members of diaspora communities debating the project within the kozarac.ba online community, and discussing issues surrounding the significance of the endeavour and the need for the inclusion of the wider community in the process. From the beginning, many survivors abroad were not informed about the project, and they only became aware of it as a result

of the online discussions and from subsequent press articles. A lack of transparency in the mediation would further contribute to the sense of isolation and marginalisation among the victims.

Closed-door Negotiations

Prior to the fieldwork, SoE mediators contacted several individuals and institutions in the UK, who might be able to help them in making contacts with local activists' groups. I received an email from the Bosnian Institute in London asking my assistance in providing some local contacts. I forwarded names of organisations and individuals that they might be interested in. Also, they were looking for an individual in the UK who could join the board as a consultant. Their main contact among the diaspora in the UK became Kemal Pervanic, a survivor of Omarska and author of a book chronicling his experience, entitled *The Killing Days*. Kemal lives in the UK, and had often appeared in media discussions regarding his experiences in the camp. Indeed, Donald Reeves and Peter Pelz, in their recently published book about the project, "The White House", mention that Kemal was an inspiration behind their involvement (Ibid: 19). Kemal, like other Bosnian representatives, valued SoE's involvement and believed that 'their hearts [were] in the right place' regardless of the fact that they were employed by Mittal to negotiate a deal to prevent further PR problems for the company. However, later evidence shows that SoE's idea of a memorial as a reconciliation experiment, rather than the simple act of recognition that the returnee community was looking for, was never explained to those who took part. The project was conducted secretly and away from the oversight of the wider Bosniak community, both local and in the diaspora.

Within weeks of contacting prominent members of the communities, a group of around twenty people was formed, which would take responsibility to negotiate and try to find common ground for a compromise concerning future memorial plans. It was assumed that identifying supporters for "an idea of a memorial" among Bosniaks and Croats would be easy, but that the Serb community would be problematic and needed to be persuaded to join in on the basis of their own self-interest. Hence, in order to get Serbs on board, SoE began to approach senior people from the Serb authorities in Prijedor,

notably the longstanding Mayor of the city, Marko Pavic. They spent much of their time in negotiations with him - so much so that sources close to him said that if SoE left Pavic alone and stopped “knocking on his door”, the memorial might have a better chance. These intensive small gatherings and individual meetings, in the summer of 2005, were meant to probe “an idea of a memorial for all”, and gauge whether there was enough goodwill or “self interest” among the communities to reach a solution. As a result, all kinds of rumours and informal talks among individuals involved in the project eventually reached wider community members. Interestingly, whilst most people continued to listen for any news of the project, anxious about possible Serb obstruction based on their reading of newspapers and informal website discussions, Emsuda Mujagic from *Srcem do Mira* was assured by SoE that Pavic was indeed willing to let the memorial be built. She was told that he could not support it publicly, as he had to think of Serb war veterans’ feelings, and the views of others from the Serb community who might not be in favour of such a project¹³⁷. Assured by the Mayor’s apparent approval, Emsuda’s job was, albeit implicitly rather than explicitly expressed, to garner support among her own community.

In public, Mayor Pavic’s formal response was to argue for the creation of a state commission to deal with issues of commemoration on all sides, asserting that he would only consider a memorial to the camp at Omarska when similar consideration was given to a monument for Serb victims of war in Sarajevo (San, 2010). SoE continued meeting Pavic in the hope of finding some kind of compromise. At the same time, the SoE group met several times a month, discussing plans for the expected memorial. Nobody outside this group knew exactly what the talks were about. Although I spoke with some of the Bosniak members of the group on a regular basis, I was unable to get much of information either at the time. The only thing I could infer from these long telephone conversations was that “Donald Reeves means well” and that they, as survivors, were being given an opportunity to talk about their experiences in the camp in front of Serb youth, mine workers and occasionally foreign media, which they saw as a small step forward. They contended that despite some “harmless” Serb kids and women from the mine administration “sometimes try[ing] to tell us that it is not true that rape took place in the camp or to reiterate that Serbs too suffered”, the Bosniak women claim to have

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been able to demonstrate that they know the facts of camp violence, as they had experienced it directly.



RS policeman guards the offices at the Omarska mine complex

These kinds of discussion appeared to be more about contesting the past rather than supporting the idea of a memorial. As mentioned earlier, several individuals who took part in these early roundtables felt unable to continue, as they believed that there was nothing to negotiate. Vedran contended “the crimes committed in Prijedor are known to every citizen of the town even if it is not openly spoken about”. Years later, he told me how he too was enthusiastic about the project, seeing it as a “revolution for Prijedor”. Initially, Vedran perceived the project as an important move in dealing with what happened in the region. He had lived in Prijedor during and after the war and believed that everybody knew who were the victims of ethnic cleansing. Instead, he saw a need for a process to create a climate in which public debates concerning the recent past would be able to take place. To his surprise, the mediation process become solely a process of “*pregovaranja*” - negotiations between the sides - in which he could not see himself having a role, as he did not regard himself a Serb, but rather a *Prijedorcanin* who wanted to face up to the past of his town.

He eventually left the project after participating in a visit to workers at the mine, where many of them claimed that “nothing happened at Omarska”, and “if there was something, it surely was not a camp” but a “*sabirni centar*” or “a transit centre for Bosniaks who needed protection from their extremists”. When the workers did finally admit that something took place here, they followed by saying: “but look at their beautiful houses in Kozarac”. Vedran inferred from this that “if it was not for us [Serbs] they [the returnees] would not have such a good life now”. On hearing such statements, he recalls how he felt goosebumps all over his body, describing the view as “madness” in which “they began by denying the crimes, only to finally interpret them as something good.” According to Vedran, the SoE mediators responded by trying to equate these views with the allegedly extreme views of local returnees in the small hamlet of Hambarine, which they were due to visit immediately afterwards, and where “there too exist many problematic, demented and aggressive individuals” . He could not comprehend how someone could compare “this madness [the Serb mine workers views] with a real human tragedy, equating those with trauma and those with fascistic tendencies”. It reaffirmed his view that the project was actively seeking to demonstrate that there are two opposing sides that both need to be encouraged to make peace with

each other. On their return from these visits, Vedran declared that the victims must be in charge of the process, whilst others can only support it:

Of course we agree that the memorial is important. Only survivors and victims should be asked about it in the first place. No other solution is acceptable or moral. Consult them. Don't ignore them. They have to say what the memorial looks like. It should reflect the enormity of the crimes that happened here, the extent of suffering at the hands of soldiers, the media and politicians only because they were not Serbs. We have to emphasise the human tragedy and avoid politics.(Pelz & Reeves, 2009:123)

Vedran's emphasis on the need to focus on the human tragedy, rather than ignore the larger body of survivors, and the need to avoid politics was not agreeable to the mediators, who responded by further locking down the process to avoid facing such criticism in public. Only trustworthy interlocutors whom SoE felt already agreed with their process were invited to the subsequent workshops. SoE's agenda increasingly became to prove that it was possible to "break through the veil of silence" by making victims and perpetrators talk to each other. However, whilst those within the SoE group played their allocated role based on their ethnicity, Vedran's critical understanding of the mediation was publicly taken up by the local NGO *Izvor*, which is a leading organisation dealing with the missing and their families. *Izvor* felt that a larger body of survivors and families of the missing urgently needed to be consulted. They too argued that only the victims ought to decide what kind of memorial they wished to build, not a small group of unemployed Serb youngsters, and certainly not Mayor Pavic, who was regarded by Human Rights Watch as clearly implicated in the crimes organised by the *krizni stab* (Serb crisis committee), of which he was a part at the time of the ethnic cleansing.

The Survivor Community

SoE assumed that Bosniaks would be more sympathetic to the project given their wartime experiences and their expressed wish to create a memorial at Omarska. So, when they approached *Izvor*, SoE emphasised Mittal's position as working with Serb partners but nonetheless their willingness to find some kind of compromise by, for example, creating a "visitor's centre" at the mine. With hindsight, in their book, the mediators recognise the upsetting nature of their proposal:

"Disregarding their obvious discomfort we continued with a description of a visitor's centre at the mine, which along with being a museum would tell its history, including its use as a concentration camp....To cap everything we spoke about the white house being made beautiful, mines being ugly places, and the need to honour the deaths of the innocent, turning the place into an oasis of peace. As though we had not inadvertently insulted them enough we suggested a union of religious symbols of death and resurrection, Christian and Bosniak at the memorial. As an example we described the church at Presnace outside Banja Luka where a Catholic priest and nun had been murdered by Serb soldiers and which had become a shrine" (Pelz & Reeves, 2009:96)

Izvor's Edin Ramulic, responded by saying: "This is scandalous! If you were not a religious organisation, I would not even talk with you and would kick you out of here" (Ibid:97). This quote was to become infamous, in that it was re-interpreted by Donald Reeves as implying that Edin threatened his life; this would be re-told repeatedly (and incorrectly) to justify his exclusion from the process. In their book, SoE repeat the allegation, described through the author's reading of an interpreter's translation, who apparently left something out of Edin's angry response. The Bosniak participants all knew Edin, who has been a leading figure in recovering the dead and locating the missing in the region, and he is known for a tendency to speak his mind directly. He is highly informed about Bosnia's recent past, and his work made him believe that only through justice and honest, albeit sometimes painful examination of the past could future co-existence succeed. I have known Edin since 2003, when I met him in Sanski Most during my research on the Bosnian Army's 17th Krajina Brigade. I too was familiar with his often impatient approach to certain issues, which sometimes bordered on contemptuous; but I was always acutely aware of his ability to produce a detailed and comprehensive assessment of most issues pertaining to war crimes and the

position of returnees in RS. He particularly enjoyed teasing his compatriots in exile through his online writing, often being critical towards their apparent apathy in relation to the political and cultural position of returnees, and his articles were read by thousands of people. Edin pointed out to the Soul of Europe that he had never encountered an oasis of peace in a place like Omarska:

I have been to many places of suffering all over the former Yugoslavia and never saw an oasis of peace. Bodies cry out for justice. They are not asking for oases of peace! I am here to make sure they get justice. Not vengeance, but justice! Victims need justice more than peace. We cannot be any part of your proposal. Talk to the families of victims. Listen to what they want, to what is important to them. This initiative has to be transparent and cannot be imposed. Nor can there be any religious components in the white house, and definitely not Orthodox ones. There can be no help for the Orthodox Church anyway. Read my lips: those who suffered want no religious symbols! (Pelz & Reeves, 2009:97)

Like Edin, others who disagreed with the SoE process reiterated the need to make the project as transparent as possible, and to consult as many survivors and families of the missing as possible. However, the mediators and some Bosniaks in the group closed ranks, and began to see any critical views as coming from “extremists”, “spoilers” or “vengeful and angry individuals” (SoE, 2005b). SoE went further by praising loyal Bosniak participants as “prominent leaders of the community” and convinced them that “only they can decide what kind of memorial will be built.” But they never defined what was meant by ‘they’ - this ambiguity appeared to be deliberate, and was reflected in the quite different stories that each participant group was told, privately, over the course of the process.

Generally, delegates from the Bosniak side interpreted the SoE process as “being on our side”, and helping them to achieve the memorial. Informality in the way the process was led, and a lack of documentation, contributed to a sense among returnee leaders that this semi-secret process was appropriate, as they were themselves used to operating in this way as a marginalised and often vulnerable social group. On the other hand, those abroad were eager to hear about the project’s conduct, and came to see its opacity as a deliberate attempt to disregard their views as though “they have no right to participate by the mere fact that they reside abroad”. This led to divisions among them, not only in

terms of those who were for or against it, but also on the question of who had the right to be involved in the project at all. Most of these debates questioning individual legitimacy revolved around questions such as “where were you during the war and what have you done to deserve to participate?” There were, of course, other implications to this issue of legitimacy, which at times resembled Serb nationalists’ discourse on belonging based primarily on ethnicity and place of residence. So, the mere fact that many remained in exile somehow gave them less right to either criticise local leaders or to fully participate in the project. Others railed against the nature of this debate, in which every communal issue seemed to lead to personal point-scoring rather than a serious attempt to grapple with the issues:

And while we are wasting our time, expressing our own self importance, Pavic is giving speeches, opening monuments to our dzelatima (war criminals). Even if we were united, it would be a very difficult task to accomplish as, on the other side, we have Serb nationalists in power. But the way we are now, we have no chance. (Kozarac.ba debate, 3 November, 2005)

Online Debate: A new public sphere

As the discussions pertaining to a memorial centre, at the site of Omarska camp that today belongs to Mittal Steel, intensify and we still have no transparent forum where all concerned could give their opinions (in fact, if we did not have this online site, all that is necessary to discuss would end up a personal communication among those who know each other). Let’s start with several questions...

Due to the closed-door approach to mediation, in the autumn of 2005, the debate about the project shifted largely to online discussion, predominantly on the Kozarac.ba forum. Debates such as “Who is in control of a memorial [process] at Omarska?” and a subsequent thread “Some questions regarding a memorial centre at the site of the former Omarska camp” were posed in order to make those already involved realise the responsibility they were taking on, but also as a way of bringing together a much larger body of survivors and others concerned and willing to play a part in the process. Most questions discussed, over the course of several months, centred around the question of why it was important for Mittal to support the project; the purpose of employing mediators; what ought to be the objectives of such a memorial; and, who should be in

charge of such a project. Discussion concerning ownership and/or management and the relationship between the future centre and the municipality of Prijedor were also hotly debated. There were numerous warnings to the Bosniaks in the SoE group not to follow in the footsteps of the “Dayton principle”, which according to many participants, was based on the idea “*bolje ista nego ništa*” (better anything than nothing) among Bosniak delegates during the Ohio talks that ended the war. Also, it was stressed that the content and design of the memorial should be carefully considered, and therefore not rushed through (Kozarac.ba debate, Oct. 2005)

Six months into the process, it was revealed that there was to be a press conference in Banja Luka, which would disclose the results of the mediation so far. There were all kinds of rumours about what this might mean, from expectations that Mittal would issue a declaration of support for the building of a memorial, to various speculations on the final design of the memorial. A month prior to the conference, an emotional online debate reached its peak as many became distraught that they still had no information about the content of the conference. Satko Mujagic, who remained in contact with *Srcem do Mira*, announced that they would all be allowed to participate after the announcement. Many online participants expressed anger and distrust towards the Bosniak representatives, who appeared to have ignored them entirely by treating such an important project as though it was a private affair. This lack of feedback continued even after the conference and foreign press reports on it:

Is this possible? Our negotiators seem to feel no responsibility to consult others. No feeling that they ought to participate in the forum in order to clarify what exactly happened in Banja Luka [conference]. This is the only place where a debate concerning the process has taken place. And no response. I feel sick of people who want to play a historical role in the foundation of a memorial centre whilst at the same time they are neither acting responsibly nor are knowledgeable to entertain such undertaking. Instead of having open discussions in order to save what can be saved, negotiators continue to treat us with silence. (Kozarac.ba debate, 6 Dec. 2005)

Prior to the conference, a British journalist wrote to SoE inquiring about details such as who was going to attend, what was going to be discussed, and whether it would be open to the public. The reply was a single sentence stating that “legitimate individuals on all

sides” would be the attendees. At that point no one actually knew who these people were. Eventually it came to light that the main participants were fourteen Serbs, six Bosniaks and four Croats. In preparation for the conference, SoE considered where such sensitive discussions ought to take place. At first, their choice was Mount Vlasic, in Central Bosnia. They argued that it was important to take people out of their everyday environment as this could have a positive impact on their behaviour and lead to favourable outcomes. But they soon realised that, for the Serb attendees from the local government, their choice of place was unacceptable. Hence they chose Banja Luka, the capital of RS. Again, no one outside of the SoE group seems to have known where, precisely, the conference was to take place. The Bosniak representatives claimed neither to know the chosen place nor what exactly was going to be discussed, maintaining that only SoE knew such details. As pressure from the diaspora mounted, SoE informed people in the diaspora to contact local associations and individuals involved to find out about the project and how they can help to get involved, because after all “it is not our memorial.” However, when those such as Kemal, who appeared to have inspired the SoE to take the project on, received no reply from either the local managers, Zoran and Anel, nor the British mediators, he inferred:

...I was the first survivor with whom “mediators” got in touch with regard to this issue [memorial]. I was quiet for some time now observing all what was happening but in fact I knew very little. As a result, it was hard to comment upon it [the process]. Even several attempts to get some information from “the right place” did not come to fruition. Moreover, my attempts to get to some information brought about tensions. If that happened to me, to whom mediators said without my support they would have not gone to Bosnia, that I was their inspiration for this process. What then should others expect? It is tragic that we had to get to this [tension] in order for some relevant information to come out. (Kozarac.ba debate, 9 December, 2005)

For the conference, Satko prepared a letter to be read by Emsuda to represent the voice of the diaspora, but it was not read out. During her talk, Nusreta Sivac was warned by Reeves not to linger on the past as it might upset the Serbs, whose support they needed.

In practical terms, it appeared that young Serbs had worked together with the survivor Rezak Hukanovic on visual designs for a memorial, which directly contradicted assurances given to the Bosniaks that there would be no design work. In their book, SoE

mediators explain these discussions about design “as a way to kindle the survivors’ imagination” (Pelz & Reeves, 2009: 104). Eventually, it was announced that Mittal would finance the building of a memorial, to be centred around the smallest building, the White House, that has such symbolic importance because of the killing and torture that took place there during the camp. Larger buildings, in which most of the survivors were interned, would not be part of the memorial. It was also agreed that new buildings would be built on the grounds behind the White House. Bosniak representatives were relieved and seemed content with their achievement. In reality, there was neither documentation nor any serious discussion about ownership or access rights to the land on which the memorial supposed to stand. Nor were security issues concerning a memorial that would be in the midst of a Serb village discussed. But fundamentally, there was no agreement to build the memorial. In the diaspora, reactions were mixed. Apart from Satko, no one seemed to regard this as a historical moment that would lead to serious negotiations with Mittal following their public declaration of support for a memorial. Most felt emotionally exhausted and troubled by its ambiguous outcome. Also, being treated as having less right to participate in the commemoration activities on the basis of residence abroad brought back a sense of alienation rooted in the experiences of forced exile: “In England, it seems that it hurt more because suddenly you are diaspora. As though I chose to be in exile. My pain does not allow me to even sleep as much as I need to...” (kozarac.ba December, 2005)”

Most survivors expressed the need to ensure the inclusion of all those buildings that formed the camp, but others argued that tactically they could not ask for more than the White House, partly because that was what survivors had asked for in their initial letter, but also because other buildings had resumed their prewar mine management function. Confronted with the idea that a brand new centre would be built, some reflected on the meaning of those buildings in which they were incarcerated:

Deserted, deathly silence, weeds everywhere...as though thousands of unseen eyes are staring at me. After forty five minutes I no longer could take it. I had to run...For me personally, Omarska ought to stay as it is. When I enter those buildings, they remind me as much of events I survived as of people who did not. But also, they remind me of criminals who took their lives away. Hence, for me, there is no need for new buildings which would be a few meters away from the existing ones in which I struggled to survive as a human being (insan), whilst being treated worse than cockroach for

two and half months. I do not want, in the future, to look out through a fence which would, according to the suggested design of the memorial, encircle those new buildings as to ensure its safety. If my visit to Omarska is to recall the hardship [suffered] then, I believe, I should be allowed to enter any of those buildings where part of me still remains; and it will endure as long as thoughts flow through my mind. Those buildings are still in there. To be honest, I have not once visited the White House. Why? Because I personally was not in it. During 1992, many times I sat in front of it but I never was inside it. Hence I have no memories attached to that particular building. On the other hand, I believe that those who survived the White House feel similar to other buildings in which they were never detained. Their memories are still in the White House. (kozarac.ba 15 Dec. 2005)

As the online debates intensified around the achievements of the conference, foreign newspapers reported on “a success story of a British clergyman in bringing former foes to agree on a memorial” whilst stressing the courage of the young Serbs who played an important role in the process. In fact, the role of the Serbs as “active and willing participants” came out as the main focus of this process: “...what makes this project unique is that the Serbs are participating actively and willingly, thanks largely to the intervention of a British clergyman”(Hawton, 2005). Meanwhile, online members of the forum tenaciously called upon their Bosniak representatives to clarify what they had actually achieved. Eventually a report was emailed to the managers of the online forum, which stated that at the Banja Luka conference, survivors, Nusreta, Murselovic, and Rezak spoke about their experiences in the camp, and Emsuda Mujagic from *Srcem do Mira* spoke of her NGO’s work and visits to Omarska since 1999. Afterwards, there was a presentation of a “design for a memorial,” which resulted from six months work by four groups of people. The report informed us that the memorial would be based around the White House and that Mittal would finance the construction. Also, it was reported that the design is not necessarily final and that, in the next phase of the project, the wider community and diaspora can participate in the final stage of its design. For that purpose, a website would be built to reach out to diaspora communities and individuals who want to participate and join the SoE group in a “constructive and positive manner”.

By December 2005, the project that began a year earlier with the survivors’ request for Mittal to grant them ownership of their “place of memory”, now seemed to be driven by an external desire for any semblance of a good news story about reconciliation. The apparent willingness of Serbs to play a part in such a project and Mittal’s public

declaration were celebrated by SoE. But in reality, despite giving local Serb youth a central role in the project, Mittal representatives seemed surprised by the continuing disapproval from the local authorities, and by Mayor Pavic's refusal to attend the Banja Luka conference. Mediators had attempted to persuade Pavic to endorse the project by exploring the possibility of building a mine village: "We proposed a visitor's centre at the mine, consisting of a technology museum where the White House could be an oasis of peace and a memorial of what happened during the war". Pavic replied:

Two parts of your project are good to my mind. Improving relations between the mine and Prijedor and presenting a good image of the town to the world. But the part about joint meetings between Serbs and Bosniaks to decide on a memorial I don't accept. You won't get the town council's agreement. They alone should decide about the white house. But I can tell you that there can be no reconciliation between the mine and a memorial.

SoE, keen to get Pavic on board, re-emphasised Pavic's notion of the importance of such a museum: "a museum that included a memorial which people could visit if they chose, but **whose chief purpose was to explain the workings of the mine**" (emphasis added) (Pelz & Reeves, 2009:91).

When they heard these details from the mediation process, many of the survivors felt betrayed and, in important ways, directly misled. They began to focus on the need for transparency and wider consultation among survivors and families of the missing, and to agree a set of principles that should underpin any memorial project. Satko, Kemal and others established a website to share ongoing details of the project and also an online petition to seek support for the principles, which centred around the need for ownership of the process by survivors and families of the missing.

Online Petition: Moving towards structure

But for that one corner, the White House ... which must belong to you, to you alone, and to the honour and memory of those brutally murdered, whom you mourn. This is an act of commemoration, not of 'reconciliation'. Let that remain clear. And anyway, why should there be 'reconciliation' until there has been RECKONING ... until the perpetrators of these crimes and those who protect them with silence and denial, admit what they did, make reparations, and apologise. It is for THEM to reconcile, not you. In a way, it is for THEM to build a memorial too - not to themselves, as they do so

brazenly, even at Trnopolje (ugh!), but to you. The monuments in Berlin were not built by the Jews, but by the Germans, by way of apology and reckoning. You should build this one yourselves, and let's talk about reconciliation only when they have built their own memorial to those they themselves killed. I unreservedly support this most moderate and reasonable of petitions, and salute all of you that have done likewise. The Bosniak people cannot and must not be betrayed yet again. (Ed Vulliamy)

No! There will be no memorial site on a corporate owned land! You are all saying this thing will never be forgotten, but where is the proof where is the evidence that can be found there were people murdered and so on here? There is no evidence but only hearsay from people ! As long as people from this village and the people from this company says NO, there should be some respect for the people and the company that are there, a memorial can never be forced on someone by law! The lawyers that are connected to this company have said there is no rule in the law book that they need to bow down to some people that wants to build a memorial on a company owned land! It is the same thing as someone wants to build something on your land, do you bow down for him? Respect the company and respect the people that live there! (Anonymous Omarska resident)

After several weeks of consultation with *Izvor*, individuals and organisations abroad, the new website was launched, outlining five key principles, emphasising that survivors and families of the dead and missing must lead the design and management of the Memorial Project, and that all stakeholders should acknowledge the psychological and historical significance of those buildings formerly used for purposes of incarceration, torture and extermination. It also sought to place commemoration before reconciliation, saying that acknowledgement of the crimes at Omarska was a “precondition for reconciliation” and implored Mittal to make a public commitment to investigate the possibility of mass graves still being present in the mine. Whilst there was no official organisation behind the petition, several survivors, including Kemal and Satko, acted as liaison with other bodies. During its construction, all Bosniak individuals in SoE’s mediation were contacted, as well as the local project managers, and they were assured that no-one was seeking to take the project away from them, only that the diaspora wanted to be involved on the basis of clear principles and a transparent approach. Only *Srcem do Mira*’s Emsuda Mujagic replied as she, through her cousin Satko, continued to stay in contact with the diaspora. She spoke with Nusreta and others, and apparently agreed to uphold those principles. However, she reiterated that these principles were exactly what they already aspired to.

Within a month of its launch, the petition had over a thousand former inmates and families signing it. Many comments conveyed sadness that such a petition was needed at all, whilst others expressed their full support for the principles. At first, things seemed encouraging, as the local players and those in the diaspora began communicating via email. However, it did not last long, as Mittal decided to “halt the project” and SoE’s contract was prematurely ended. This announcement brought back tensions among local leaders and the diaspora, based on SoE’s analysis that “more extreme voices on all sides [had] begun to oppose the plans” but also the mediators’ assurance to the Bosniaks that Serbs are ready for the memorial. The BBC worked with Donald Reeves to cover the project, and reported how it was remarkable as it involved all three sides, Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats as “a rare example of cross-ethnic co-operation over such a controversial issue” (Hawton, 2006). However, after Mittal’s paused the project, the report claimed that on the one hand, Serbs argued “there should not even be a memorial,” whilst on the other their Bosniak counterparts “believe it should not be built until all the victims have been located and only then if the whole mine - which is currently working again - is used for the memorial”(Ibid). The latter claim was essentially false, as no individual or organisation (including the petition web site) had stated such a position, and during negotiations it was clear that survivors were the party most likely to compromise. From the start, they asked only for the White House, as they were well aware that other buildings were already being used by the re-opened mine.

In the Bosnian media, a local television station run by Rezak Hukanovic (one of SoE’s trusted players) conducted an interview with Murselovic, the main Bosniak representative in the process, who claimed that “extremists in the diaspora” had stopped the project going further. This generated further tension between the local, self-declared representatives and those in the diaspora. Satko and others attempted, on various occasions, to contact those few that were involved in the process in order to find some kind of common ground, but most did not reply or if they answered a telephone call, they often seemed to agree with his position. In practice, I observed several meetings of various organisations and individuals in which often a nod or silent acquiescence were taken as positive outcomes, as reaching a common goal. In reality, these active members of the community had acted as individuals inferring from either their own experience or perception how the project should be handled.

This way of working, in which an individual perceives his or her collectivity's needs as a 'given' and thus equates themselves with representing these needs, continues to be the most salient aspect of the way the community operates on a collective level. For example, in May 2006, a meeting was organised by Mittal's agents in Europe, in which they invited the local managers of the previous process and those who formed the petition. Each party presented their proposals. Those representing the petition stressed the petition's principles and a desire to find a solution in which Mittal would not have to play an active part. They spoke of creating a foundation consisting of survivors and an advisory body that would manage and begin a process of consultation asking for a lease of the White House as a base for a future memorial. The local men, the managers of the former SoE process, presented their proposal, which called the active members of diaspora, mainly survivors, as "spoilers, extremists" who should be excluded from the project due to their destructive nature. Instead, they called for politicians and other governmental officials to run the future foundation, with a few places for survivors who could play an advisory role. Both parties turned up as the legitimate representatives of the recently registered association of inmates of Prijedor as, it appeared, the president of the association, Nusreta Sivac had signed both proposals. The reality was that Nusreta never managed to read the managers' proposal as it was given to her late one evening and she was pressured to sign it as a member of the SoE process. Ironically, it was those in the diaspora, including Satko, who had encouraged the registration of the inmates' association, and financed its modest start in the hope that this would encourage a strong, local organisation that would become a bedrock for future memorial projects. The meeting, however, did not accomplish one of its main goals, that of the Bosniaks appearing united in their effort to create a memorial. And, while one could argue the petition essentially expressed the needs of many, and therefore its members had legitimacy to truly represent and discuss the future plans; on the other hand, it appeared to threaten the position of local managers employed by SoE to run the project. The latter's role, within the local settings, could easily be understood as "the authoritative voice" on the issues of memorial by the mere fact that they were working with foreigners. In short, any association with foreigners must grant the success of a project as foreigners, in this particular context of postwar society, are often perceived as "omnipotent individuals". *Moc* (power) or *vlast* translated as authority was often perceived to be synonymous with them even before their post is understood. With

hindsight, this meeting signalled the end of the beginning. In the following two years, local actors failed to act in concert, which reduced the pressure on Mittal to deal with the issue at all; and as a result, nothing much happened apart from the emotional turmoil that the SoE mediation process generated for survivors and the local community. Locally, other inmate groups quarrelled over who had the right to represent various categories of the community. Finally, Mittal effectively washed their hands of the problem by informing the survivors that they should approach the local Serb authority first and request their support for the memorial before Mittal would take the process any further.

Chapter 5: How Would Justice and Healing Look Like If Victims Were Consulted?

At the end, we are not capable as we are all, generally speaking, victims and victims are not able to objectively differentiate reality. We are burdened with various syndromes which occur in the victims, for example, a sense of admiration of war criminals, or enjoying the status of victims without any real intent to ever overcome it. We are too burdened with our own behaviour at a time when we lived through trauma that we would now be able to realistically look at the responsibility of others. (E. Ramulic, 24 Dec, 2006)

That “better Serbia” does not even go to vote because they are always in a hangover after previous night of partying with which they often finish their expensive projects. Not long ago, I, myself, used to contribute for “that better Serbia” to receive international [financial] donation in order to become even “better” and “fatter”. Unfortunately, when the bright lights of Belgrade salons switch off and subdue, then, you realise that their distant party’s sparkles do not illuminate our Bosnian darkness. In fact, they make it gloomier. It is only a question of time when such darkness will cover your eyes too. Perhaps you will recognise yourself in the words of N, when she publicly declares: R is a victim and therefore he has no responsibility for what he is saying. In translation, [mentally] unfit. For her (them) you are good as long they feel sorry for you and are stroking you over your head whilst you are talking about your suffering and your compatriots. They, that “better Serbia”,...know better what victims need than victims themselves. Bemuse them with expensive hotels, sometime they fly them in aeroplanes and then, they tell you: you are unfit (neuracunljiv). You do not know what you need. We know. Hence, donors have confidence in us and award us. It is not a coincidence that this text describes that S lost parents and a brother, because his suffering in the camp of Omarska is not attractive (bloody) enough for Belgrade’s blood thirsty public. It is also important to show, to donors, that they brought most useful (unfit) examples of victims to Belgrade. (E. Ramulic, 19 Sept. 2010 kozarac.ba)

A central tension among victims’ groups and individuals concerns the notion of the “victim”. Specifically, the perception of a victim is closely linked to the particular experience they suffered, mainly interrogation and incarceration in one or more of the three camps set up to process all the non-Serb population, which was earmarked for expulsion or murder. From a local understanding, *zrtva*, the victim, is an innocent individual who has suffered and lost members of his or her family without actively playing part in those events. Within the collective, *zrtva* is also an agent able to fight for the truth to be revealed and remembered in the midst of widespread denial. However,

whilst talking about the past is perceived as a positive contribution, and a way of promoting the truth in public, in fact it is individual practical contribution that defines one's place within the community. Many agree that building a company, opening new workplaces, educational or youth festivals for children ¹³⁸, supporting local students and schools is of paramount importance in ensuring the survival of the community. If a survivor manages to both speak and act for the benefit of his community, then his public appearance as a "self-declared" survivor is less negatively assessed, and his or her contribution may be fully appreciated at times. Contrary to the universalisation of the trauma paradigm, the victims themselves evaluate one another according to social position and hierarchy of suffering inflicted in the specific time and place in history. The authenticity of a voice, and their legitimacy to speak in public, is measured according to the above rudiments. However, this is rarely discussed openly and it resurfaces in one-to-one conversation, or if I ask about a friend or colleague, it is understood that I might be implying that person's experience is more worthy than the person I am speaking with. It is also observable in many communal meetings, where one can discern from the language used a sense of one's own importance. A dominant element of all interactions is the need to stress individual contribution to the community hitherto, and his or her future work. This is particularly evident in NGOs and the way they conduct their work.

Like anywhere else, in Kozarac there are people who involve themselves in NGOs and local organisations, and a majority who do not. The former, previously a fairly ad hoc group, have in recent years begun to institutionalise themselves as local experts. In the latter group, people just want to share the memory of a past life and express the suffering resulting from the "critical event" (Das, 1997). In this section, I will consider the making of experts and the role of the individual narratives they construct for their community - *svjedocenja* (testimonies). These stories illuminate the victims' need to control their destiny, but also a desire to have an impact on a society that brought their

138 For the last three years, a survivor and the founder of a UK charity "*Most Mira*" (bridge of peace), Kemal Pervanic, has organised a youth festival in the village of Kevljani every summer. Lasting a week, children from local primary schools, Serbs, Bosniaks and others get the opportunity to learn various skills such as circus skills or play an instrument. This year, over ninety international youth and adults have volunteered in organising a fun-filled week for the youngsters of the region. According to Pervanic the "core mission has been to create independent space for collaboration for children from all backgrounds in the Prijedor region of Northern Bosnia and to overcome the segregation that was caused by the war".

trauma into being, even if only to claim small victories such as those embodied in stories of encounters with former interrogators. In much research on trauma, one is often overwhelmed with a pool of meanings attached to the survivor's psyche. This is particularly evident in the works of psychoanalysts, literary critics and other social science disciplines whose work has tracked society's desire to understand cultural representations of trauma. The language of therapy, the talking cure and medicalisation of an individual psyche has resulted in a focus on how to modify the negative feelings of survivors, and arguably perpetrators, as a way of dealing with collective trauma (Summerfield 2002, Tall 1996).

The Making of Local Experts

Over the last decade, *Izvor*'s encounters with various foreign academic and media researchers have given them an insight into the general unfamiliarity of the victim's post-war world to others, and how this might be a good conversation starter for those who come to explore and learn about their life. But often they encounter researchers whose knowledge of the political and social situation in which they work and live is so sketchy that they become impatient. As a representative of *Izvor* said to me: "we do not want to waste our time any longer with every single passer-by who wishes to either develop his career or play at being an expert of our situation"¹³⁹. In the immediate aftermath of the conflict, all foreigners were welcome to explore the world of injustice and suffering that resulted from the war, and locals hoped that something good might come of the time they invested in helping, informing, translating and driving them around. In the last five years, however, local NGOs have begun to see them in a new light, as the example of above quotation regarding "better Serbia" illustrates, but also because their own perception of the situation as "the victims" has evolved. As a result of participating in seminars, conferences and regular round-table discussions organised by international agencies, where their principal role is to represent victims, and to learn from "experts" from around the world, they have realised that their knowledge of post-war return and re-integration is more substantive than the largely theoretical knowledge of the so-called experts. For local NGOs, meetings between foreign experts and local organisations are now often regarded as unproductive, but they continue to play along to

¹³⁹ Fieldnotes, July 2008.

access funding opportunities, hoping they make small steps forward in the process, whilst publicly declaring the importance of such workshops. International agencies remain the main vehicles interested in the development of civil society in Bosnia. In this context, SoE's surprised reaction at the meeting with *Izvor*, where they expected unconditional support but received criticism concerning the process of setting up a memorial to Omarska camp, makes sense.

The treatment of victims as one-dimensional beings, who, by the mere fact that they all experienced a similarly traumatic event are lumped together and assumed to have broadly similar understanding of events and ways of coping, is certainly a constraint on social recovery. As with other communities - arguably more so because of the impact of trauma - survivors and returnees have a diverse range of ideas, feelings and understanding of how best to re-establish their communities. Here, I will explore the role of the victims' associations and concerned individuals, their interaction and perceptions of themselves and the recent past. In particular, I will address the political question of "*manipulacija zrtava*" (manipulation of victims) which is often discussed by Bosnian media in the context of the way that political elites use and abuse the term 'victim'. As previously noted, various factions within victims' groups have experienced tensions and formed views on which individuals or groups are legitimate and which they feel are not when it comes to the survivors' struggles over the memorial. Indeed, much of their discussion, and most of their heated disputes, over the process of memorialisation of the camp centred around the question: who are the victims, and who has the right to speak on behalf of the collective? This ongoing struggle over legitimacy has divided popular support among the local and diaspora communities, as family, friends, neighbours and comrades in arms had to choose to support one or other of the representative organisations.

In addition, given the fact that there is no institution within Republika Srpska (RS) that concerns itself with the social and political life of returnees, NGOs seem to be the only social organisations monitoring conditions of minority rights and seeking to uphold

them. In the entity of Republika Srpska, returnee rights¹⁴⁰ are not incorporated within the local governmental institutions and therefore, in practical terms, they could not apply for any funds until very recently as there was no budget allocated for dealing with civil victims of war and their associations. In contrast, for example, the RS entity government is a major funder of the three main Serb war-related organisations: the War Veterans, the Association of Camp Inmates and the Organisation for Captured and Killed Soldiers and Missing Civilians. For example, Serb war veterans received over four hundred thousand convertible marks (KM) in 2010 for their activities.¹⁴¹

The Association(s) of Camp Inmates

The NGO sector has become an alternative to a widespread unemployment encouraged by corrupt international donors who have no sincere intention to make our civil society (an NGO employee, May 2011)

Izvor and *Srcem do Mira* have been the two leading leading organisations to emerge from the war dealing with the needs and concerns of the community in Kozarac and Prijedor, from the time of exile through to Sanski Most and the operation in Lusci Palanka to plan the eventual return home. In the last couple of years, *Izvor* has focused on assisting local courts in processing war criminals by supporting, in practical and psychological terms, witnesses who are willing to testify in courts. Meanwhile, *Srcem do Mira* in many ways resembles a well established community centre that keeps the issues of the past alive, but also showcases ongoing communal life. For many years, the legacy of camps did not prompt returnees to form an association of former inmates, although there are always individuals active in this area and available to talk to and work with other bodies when needed. Since 2004, Satko Mujagic's *Optimisti* group in the Netherlands has suggested many times that such an association was necessary given

140 Whilst, according to Dayton Accords, Bosnia has three constitutive peoples: Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats, implying that they all ought to have equals rights within both entities, in practice, as the entity of RS implies, this is an entity for Serbs. In addition, due to the smaller number of Bosniak returnees to the RS, it means that they are also minority which in effect translates into "larger (numbers) of an ethnic group dominating and discriminating against the smaller" as a recent Ministry of Education of Sarajevo canton report by Emir Suljagic states, regarding discrimination in schools.

141 *Social Inclusion Foundation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (SIF in BiH) and Civil Society Promotion Center (CSP)*, "Halfway There: Government Allocations for the Non-governmental Sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2010" (Sarajevo: February 2011). Also, Bougarel (2006) writes how these organisations are recognised as official partners and as such receive large subsidise, p114.

the history of the town. At the time, the only association of this kind existed in Germany as a response to German policy of sending back refugees immediately after the war. The Prijedor association was set up to halt expulsion, as they claimed to have suffered psychological and physical harm and therefore were not ready to return.

The association of camp inmates was eventually registered in Prijedor in the summer of 2007 as “Prijedor - 92”, initiated and financially supported by *Optimisti*, *Izvor* and *Srcem do Mira*. It was contended that a large body of survivors’ wished to have their own organisation that could represent their needs in future discussions with Mittal concerning the Omarska memorial. As most survivors reside in the diaspora, discussions concerning the name of the organisation and whether its office ought to be in Prijedor or Kozarac were primarily held online. In the early days, after it began the work of gathering names of former camp inmates and enrolling them into its membership, another association was set up in Kozarac. Although Prijedor’s association meant to include all the regional members, including Kozarac, some thought that there was a need to have “our own inmates’ association”. A former soldier of the 17th Brigade, Hifo, registered the association of inmates, “Kozarac” in September 2007. On the online forums, many argued that personal aspirations, and a lack of job opportunities were the main reasons behind having two associations in the region. Hifo claimed to have over a thousand members prior to registering the Kozarac association, saying that former inmates were happy to deal with their needs in Kozarac rather than Prijedor. Both associations asserted to represent former inmates and their applications concerning restitution.

Predictable tensions concerning who has the right to represent former inmates ensued between the two associations, and became very personal. Presidents and secretaries of the associations were judged according to their personal traits, such as whether they exude confidence in their appearance; their suffering, such as whether they were in the camps and their degree of loss of family members; and the contribution they had made to the “survival of their community”. The perdurance of a hierarchy of suffering among members of the community means that any discussion is contrived to match the perceived position of the subject regardless of his or her capacity to grapple with a particular issue. Thus, “Prijedor 92” was considered as a more democratic agency,

which gave “everybody the right to share their opinion and play a part in its formation,” whilst “Kozarac” was borne out of a reaction to the former without much consultation with the local or diaspora communities. Nonetheless, Hifo was able to garner a large body of former comrades in arms as he was already the secretary of a former soldiers’ association based in Kozarac. In addition, the prewar rivalry between Prijedor and Kozarac inhabitants (and a perceived rivalry over urban versus rural mentality) was brought to the fore. As with all attempts at social cohesion, this was very soon perceived as “another example of inability and incompetence of us to, at least, appear united”. Both associations relied on financial support from the diaspora. They would send their representative to Prijedor and Kozarac during the summer months to collect membership fees from visitors, and many would apply to both organisations, sometimes thinking they were in fact one body. More important for the diaspora was not local rivalry, but the need for a credible organisation, wherever it was based.

Bosniak Politicians in the Prijedor Municipality

Here, it is good for perhaps a dozen of Bosniaks who are hand-in-hand with Dodik and Pavic, the rest are without future. There is no force to create a vision but only a few loan sharks who are only thinking for themselves. (Sead Ćirkin, former commander of 17th and former MP in Prijedor)

The Dayton Peace Agreement enshrined a theoretical right for people to either return to their original homes or to choose to stay where they ended up after the war ended, resulting in many house swaps between entities. It did little in reality to reverse the process of ethnic cleansing, and so post-war Bosnia looks far more divided and polarised than the very mixed ethnic map that predated 1992. Today, it is accepted as the norm, partly because of Dayton’s power-sharing provisions, that an ethnic majority is entitled to more rights, in all aspects of life, than those that belong to a minority. This practice is widespread through all regions, towns and even villages in Bosnia. A distressing aspect of this is that, in the consciousness of its people, there seems to be an absence of any empathetic considerations towards the minority, even though each group is aware that whilst they might be enjoying majority rule in one place, their own people might be discriminated against in another. Minorities have accepted and perceive

themselves as unequal citizens of a place. Consequently, within minority communities, an enclave mentality often pertains, in which its permanent residents have become completely inward looking, and in searching for personal fulfilment, its community has socially and culturally stagnated. Another visible effect of this process is the tendency of post-war politicians belonging to a minority to occupy a symbolic niche within the dominant parliament or local assembly of “the other”, fulfilling a democratic mandate on behalf of ‘their’ people, but without having any power over the political and social development of their region.

In the early days of return, Bosniak politicians in the local assembly in Prijedor were generally seen as a way of entering the social and political structures of the new political entity of RS. In the first local election, there were 22 Bosniak members of the assembly. Many of them were former soldiers of the 17th Brigade, including eminent members of the prewar community, such as the businessman, Muharem Murselovic and the former Secondary school teacher, Mesud Blazevic. The reason for former soldiers to play a part in politics was that it was regarded as a way to garner electoral support from within the diaspora. However, some soldiers were unable to deal with sitting around the table with war criminals that either were their interrogators or had been known to have committed war crimes. One such member of the assembly recalled to me how, during a session where a Serb member was speaking, he began imagining all the Serb members being killed. He said: I took my gun and looked at their faces that pretended to bear with us knowing that they wished us death; I pulled the trigger and suddenly all of them were dead. I felt happy”. He realised that he could not deal with seeing them every day and although he formally remained a member of the local government, he never again attended the assembly.

In conversation with several Bosniak politicians who have been in office, on and off, since 1996, they contend that the main reason why the Bosniak inhabitants of Prijedor have remained politically weak and unrepresented is an inability within the Bosniak elite to share their power and position with others. In other words, a small group of individuals have continued to support each other and enlist their names on the ballot. To some extent, they were the only ones available in the first few years of coming home. On the other hand, some argue that a couple of the currently prominent

politicians were reluctant to allow any educated younger members of their community to take a post in the local institutions. Returning as a minority, I was told, meant that there will be no important jobs for them to claim, but if they have a strategy they could, for example, employ a doctor in the local hospital, an engineer in the department of commerce and so on. However, those who wanted to be a “one-man leader” of the Bosniaks’ struggle and future success seem to have prevailed.

Many members of various Bosniak organisations have made similar points about each other in terms of an inability to delegate, share the workload and the funding. This has created a culture in which a dozen individuals that pioneered the return have remained the main spokespeople and community leaders. At first, the returnee community regarded these individuals highly, and their public personae grew as many researchers and the media continued to seek their opinion about life as a returnee in RS. However, in recent years, many have become disillusioned as local NGOs began to openly speak of Bosniak politicians’ fight to remain in office as “*foteljasi*” (they fight for their armchair). Their conduct during assembly sessions and in public has been scrutinised more closely prior to local elections by local NGOs and journalists in order to raise awareness of local politics among the diaspora electorate.

In one online forum thread, “I know them...” over four thousand potential voters discussed their politicians’ treatment of the recent past and their efforts (or lack thereof) to reintegrate returnees. Several people claimed that the Bosniak politicians, in particular, Azra Pasalic, the Bosniak President of Prijedor’s municipal council, are doing everything to forget the past and present Prijedor as a “beacon of return and tolerance”. Supporting Mayor Pavic’s wish to encourage international investment, in meetings with foreign diplomats, media and at various workshops, Pasalic has asserted that “returnees are sharing the same fate as other citizens, and [that] Prijedor is a safe and favourable place for foreign investment,” maintaining that the municipality is doing everything it can in giving everybody equal and fair treatment in employment, regardless of ethnicity. However, she regrets the fact that her neighbourhood is devoid of Bosniak intellectuals, and because most returnees don’t have a university education, this means that job opportunities are scarce. For them, however, her assertion “*ti stradalnici rata*” (those casualties of war) are slowly reintegrating into the community

which they “had to leave”, and that “barriers between indigenous, refugees and returnees are disappearing” has caused indignation. A decade since return, they felt that their reintegration has been stalled, and their feeling of “being treated as a second grade citizen” has only been augmented by her own words that suggest they are still only returnees and therefore not on a par with the indigenous or refugee population.

The precarious sense of belonging among the inhabitants of Kozarac is regularly reinforced with the anniversary of the foundation of Republika Srpska on 9th January each year. Nineteen years ago, in response to being outvoted in the former parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Serbian deputies issued a Proclamation of the Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since then, RS government institutions commemorate the Republic’s day by laying a wreath on the monuments erected to remember fallen soldiers, followed by congratulations on the anniversary to all citizens of the entity, which led to the birth of Serb Republic. The local Prijedor newspaper, *Kozarski Vjesnik*, is no exception. As a president of the Prijedor council, Azra Pasalic has given her statement on the anniversary to the newspaper for the past couple of years. In 2009, local Bosniak politicians and ordinary people began a campaign against Pasalic’s public praise of the entity that they regarded as a fascist enterprise built on their suffering and loss. Under pressure, she claimed that she never mentioned the “state” but rather spoke of an entity and the fault was with the newspapers’ transcription of her statement. For most people, her public speeches resemble the Mayor’s rhetoric of tolerance, multi-ethnicity and Prijedor’s ability to move forward to a future of jobs and prosperity, and they feel this renders them voiceless. Many voted for Azra Pasalic as she was a respected doctor and herself suffered during ethnic cleaning, being kept under house arrest and subsequently expelled, whilst her old parents were murdered at home. But the gulf between their own views and their own experience and Azra’s patriotic rhetoric means some no longer feel represented by her actions.

The overwhelming sense of disempowerment of ordinary people stands in stark contrast to the few Bosniaks that hold positions within the local government, and yet their experience of remaking home in a new political entity as a marginalised community is often articulated through these politicians. Some commentators have remarked that in Bosnia there is a widespread apathy and inability on the part of people to deal with their

own politicians and criminals, claiming that this is due to the prevalence of nationalist discourse in the media that persistently urges their ethnic group to vote for them, as any other alternative will bring about “*unistenje*”, elimination or destruction of “their own”. In other words, dissemination of fear has become the key feature of ethnopolitics, which only promulgates divisions among their constituencies whilst advancing their own position. Bosnian society, as Lovrenic (2010) argues, has yet to deal with social segregation and a lack of responsibility emanating from the absence of political reflection. Thus asymmetrical power relations continue to be reflected in the language of the dominant majority, who endorse the status quo and the idea of “moving on” towards economical progress, whilst the weak minority persists in trying to slowly pursue bottom-up social change.

Svjedocenja: Bearing witness within the survivor community

The dead still roam there [Omarska], I felt them. They felt me too and slowly came near... as if they were crouching in every corner ... listening to how I was describing events and dates, important moments, times of day. Faces, screams and tears, tortured corpses, massacred, yellow truck, the name, rank ... chlorine smell in the toilets, queues for food, hunger, light. Dark ... And, they were content that I mentioned them.¹⁴²

An extensive literature on narratives as memory practice asserts the survivor’s need to remember as a duty to the dead. The idea that “ghosts”, images of dead inmates, remain in the present world of a survivor is well documented by those that survived, and confirmed by scholarly investigation. Satko’s tenacity to continue the initiative for a memorial to the Omarska camp over a period of seven years can perhaps be partly explained by his unwillingness to let go of his murdered friend, and through him, “all those ghosts that stare at him” when he visits the site of the Omarska camp. Nusreta Sivac’s willingness to give her testimonies to both the national court and the Hague Tribunal despite her knowledge that each testimony badly affects her health, is her way of remembering and paying her dues to those that “have not made it”, specifically to five women who were murdered in the camp. It is about giving the dead some kind of peace and justice. So, for the survivors testifying in the courts, their sense of justice is

¹⁴² Mujagic, Satko, “Festival Mrtvi” at <http://kasaba.blogger.ba/arhiva/2008/03/28/1456733>. ...ref and translation/explain

closely related to the dead rather than the living. The murdered individuals from the Prijedor region are often described as “the best among us who were taken”. In popular culture, there is a belief that “all that was worth something was murdered”, which is often reiterated when the in-group tensions, predominantly among the local NGOs, individual quarrels and personal greed, are heightened.

Throughout this thesis, these stories of in-group tensions reflect the struggle to overcome both the collective and the individual trauma that each individual and their community grapple with. Furthermore, while I concur with the scholarly claim that it is the most vulnerable period, such as an event of great distress and suffering, that is often treated as the foundation of identity on a national, grand narrative scale, however, on the micro level, the question of identity, in all its multifaceted sense of the self, from personal to collective, remains in a tenuous and vulnerable state. In some way, the foundation of the entity of Republika Srpska as a political organisation is legitimised through constant reiteration of its Serb political leadership claim that “*otadžbinski ratovi*” (wars for the homeland) were, in essence, their liberation movement, and as such provides its Serb citizens with a new wave of patriotism in relation to the newly created “state” of the Serbian Republic. On the other hand, for the Bosniak minority within the entity, but also more generally, the making of identity is much more complex. The founding moment is not coherent as they have lived the last four hundred years, politically and culturally, under major Empires and then within a multi-ethnic republic of the Yugoslav Federation. As such, defending the state of Bosnia, during and after the war, was a way of keeping a sense, albeit vague, of Bosnian(ness) (Lovrenovic, 2010, Hoare, 2007). The overall implication was that all different people are Bosnian if they wish to be, but Bosniaks are regarded as genuine and the only advocates of the identity that continued to exert its belonging to Bosnia. This conception of identity does not appeal to Serb or Croat sense of belonging which is not the same, and it differs from their simpler model of ethnically-based states (Lovrenovic, 2010).

In this section, I will focus on the narratives that are disseminated among survivors and their community in order to illuminate stories that differ from the conventional narratives articulated in public when talking about trauma and identity to the media or other inquirers. I will argue that most narratives, written and spoken, are cogent and

self-reflective pertaining to the subject's position during and after the traumatic event. Broadly speaking, they convey the author's composure in articulating a diverse life's experiences and ruminations on the past and present. More importantly, it's opposed to the subject's need to explain oneself in public when discussing a relationship, or lack of it, with the other; here, we see the unspoken rule that the reader is expected to understand, such as the fact that in any social or ethnic group, there are good and bad people. These stories, including those about brave Serb neighbours who acted as rescuers, are told without a burden of an ethnic identity. In such cases, any readers' negative nationalistic comments are either ignored or treated with contention whilst the rescuer is admired for "being human" and "a Serb that his people ought be proud of" in times of great upheaval.

Whilst many depict suffering and loss, the stories cohere into a convincing stories of survival. The evidence suggests that traumatic experience can be a source of improved resilience, as Nietzsche infamously remarked. I construe the notion of resilience as reflected in the idea of maintaining "a stable equilibrium", and a relatively healthy psychological and physical functioning after the event (Bonanno, 2004). It differs from recovery, which connotes a trajectory in which normal functioning, after exposure to trauma or loss, gives way to threshold psychopathology symptoms of PTSD, depression and other conditions related to fear and anxiety, before improving. Dealing with "complicated grief" (Neimeyer et al, 2002) may require professional intervention in order to recover; however, there is a growing body of research that suggests the effect of loss and trauma does not always lead to individual psychological symptoms. Some claim that even the most aversive events illustrate that large number of individuals cope well without developing long term mental health problems. Empirical evidence shows that, for those exposed to massive loss and traumatic events, personal traits such as hardiness, self-enhancing attributes, even repression of negative emotions, may act as positive disposition or adaptive mechanisms for coping after the event and illuminate why human resilience is more common than thought in the literature on trauma and loss. For example, a study conducted by mental health professionals among bereaved individuals in Sarajevo and those in the US suggest that self-enhancers were better adjusted (Bonanno, Field, Kovacevic & Kaltman 2002). In addition, apart from personal traits, familial and social environment, the structure of support and protective factors

need to be accounted for in order to evaluate whether one's life trajectory is likely to follow recovery or resilience.

In reading over sixty stories of survival, and a couple of (unpublished) personal diaries, I have identified two main categories of narration. Firstly, stories of bravery, describing human resilience in the midst of an individual's torment in the hands of interrogators or guards at the camp; or in the meetings of the latter in local settings a decade or so after life in exile; stories of solidarity among inmates, and rare examples of rescuers belonging to the "other" group during ethnic cleansing. These stories, as opposed to conventional narratives with a beginning, middle and end, are often left open-ended, or with an end that is formulated to jump directly from one specific time of the individual's suffering in the past to the present position of the character. In this way, the character's moral virtue and emotional capacity is accentuated. Another category of narration depicts the tragedy and sadness of extreme vulnerability and lack of control over one's destiny, in de-humanised conditions, in which (for example) only rain is perceived as an empathetic, natural force that shares the burden of violence suffered. I label these narratives 'the humane face of the rain.'

The story of Sendo was widely read on kozarac.ba as it captures the feelings of betrayal by a friend or acquaintance, and a representation of "a carnivalesque glee in the suffering of others,"¹⁴³ but also the strength and dignity of the victim. A man in his twenties, Sendo, was regarded by his friends as a wanderer, who was often seen "hanging around" the cinema or waiting for his girlfriend, Azra, to return from school at the bus stop. A fragile and sensitive young man, according to the narrator, Azra was his anchor. One summer evening, he became anxious about rumours that Azra might have another boyfriend. To assuage that suspicion, he went to a local bar and got drunk. A local policeman, Krstan, arrived and asked him if he would buy a drink for "*narodnoj vlasti*" (the people's authority). Sendo retorted that this was all he needed to ruin his

143 La Capra(1998: 38), and to some extent Goldhagen's provocative book (1997), in which he claimed a large number of ordinary people were "Hitler's willing executioners," write about an elevated state of awareness for those engaged in inflicting pain on "the other" that cannot be rationally understood even for those participating in it. La Capra, notes that "the victimizing excesses of the Nazi genocide were related to a deranged sacrificialism in an attempt to get rid of Jews as dangerous, impure objects that contaminated the community of people". In Bosnia, this sense of impurity is sometimes perceived as the legacy of the religious conversion left by the Ottomans.

night, and the backward shepherd should go back where he came from and mind the sheep in the mountains above the town. A fight ensued, in which Sendo was beaten. His family sent him to Zagreb, Croatia, as punishment for his behaviour, and he only returned on the eve of the ethnic cleansing of Kozarac. Like many other men, he soon found himself in Omarska camp. During one of his interrogation sessions, where inmates were supposed to sign various documents implicating themselves in a plan to get rid of their Serb neighbours, he recognised Krstan as his interrogator, but Krstan could not recognise him due to the effect of his beatings. Instead of signing a document, Sendo decided to draw a sheep. At that point, Krstan realised that their paths had crossed before, and he decided to make Sendo's life in the camp unbearable. The narrator briefly depicts some of the suffering that Sendo had to endure, and how at the point when he could no longer take it, Sendo decided to communicate his last "worldly deed". Krstan wanted to extract from him information about where he hid his money, and Sendo finally appeared willing to "confess." But by this time, he was physically unable to speak. He used his last scream to call for his interrogator, and using rudimentary sign language, he called Krstan to him. Krstan was pleased to see that Sendo was willing to communicate and sat him at the table. Sendo showed three fingers as a sign that there were three things Krstan needed to know. And as the story goes, the first two words were clear to Krstan: "to take," and the third seemed equally easy to guess: men. He inferred that Sendo was trying to say "take your men to Kozarac". At that point, Sendo shook his head, vehemently disagreeing, and endeavoured to make sure that Krstan understood the last word correctly. Krstan became irritated and for a moment turned away from him, whilst Sendo made his last sound before being slaughtered – the baaing sound of a sheep. He was mocking him. As an epilogue, the narrator recalls meeting Azra, Sendo's former girlfriend, standing on the ground where the cinema used to be, completely absorbed in her thoughts. She told the narrator that she would give up all her life and opportunities in exile if she could see Sendo patiently waiting for her at the bust stop one more time.¹⁴⁴

In stories of dehumanisation, the symbolic depiction of rain often appears to assuage the immediate experience of loss. A symbol of empathy when a human being is stripped of humanity, home, identity, feelings and ideals. In such a context, many have remarked

¹⁴⁴ Sendo, kozarac.ba January 1, 2007.

how, on the days of particular egregious instances of violence and expulsion, there was unusually heavy rain. A story of the day when the old sixteenth century mosque in Prijedor was set ablaze, illustrates the victim's desire "not to give up" and the rain's role in it (Redzic, 2006). The author writes about the days before he was taken to the camp. Awaiting a day of "being taken" and observing the flames of the burning Mosque from his flat, he recalls "as she was vanishing in the fire as though she was leaving a message that she will not surrender so easily and that we will remember her," juxtaposing this with the next day's inscription on the ruins: "where is your mosque - *allahimanet*". The sense of loss and social ostracism invoked the urge to resist it within the context of manmade destruction. In reality, the ongoing slaughter of "all non-Serb existence in this town" (*svega sto nije srpsko*) at the time, gave away to metaphorical contemplation of the rain as a force that shares the victim's plight and thus provided a refuge:

Those days, every day in the afternoon...[it rained] as if the heaven's wept over what had befallen us. Prior to the clouds, for a moment, [the ruins of the Mosque would] lift up, in fact, more like it swelled up; deposited mass of ruins and a small dust burst into a cloud of smoke. And, so it goes, until I was taken to the camp, albeit demolished the Mosque continue to fight and defy her arsonists.(Ibid, 2006)

For others, rain is seen as a saviour¹⁴⁵. In a recent interview, a survivor of Srebrenica, describes his horrific escape from Srebrenica, when the town was taken by the Serb army in July of 1995. He walked as part of a column of those who refused to surrender, through forests and mountains towards the Bosnian held town of Tuzla, and during the March, his father and three brothers were killed before he managed to pass through the Serb frontline. At the moment when he reached the frontline, a hail storm began. The Serb soldiers "retreated into bunkers and shelters" and with the ceasing of the storm, he was able to cross the line to free territory without being noticed¹⁴⁶. In Kozarac, many recall a time when they discovered or stumbled across mass graves, and how during the exhumation of the remains, it rained as though "the heaven's was crying with us". Similarly, it has been noted how every July, on the day of the mass funerals, the rain comes to "share tears with the mothers."

145 As noticed in the chapter on the 17th Brigade, the harsh weather conditions during the winter months, at times when, in the disadvantageous position of attacking the enemy from the bottom of the Mount Vlasic, the snow was figured as the saviour against the booby traps laid all over the mountain.

146 Vukic, Suzana,. 2011, :Revisiting The Srebrenica Slaughter", <http://www.instituteforgenocide.ca/revisiting-srebrenica-slaughter>.

Stories of encounters, after a decade in exile, between the victim and former friends on the streets of Prijedor, chronicle a surprise for both protagonists: the survivor's shock when confronted with a former friend's welcoming smile and "open arms" on the one hand, and the perpetrator's apparent incomprehension in receiving "the cold shoulder" or "seeing a ghost" from the past:

When he saw me, his face smiled, looking at me straight into my eyes, with open arms and wholeheartedly said: "May I" It is a gesture when one meets a dear friend that you wish to embrace or at least shake hands with. It must be that through my gaze permeated with ice in me, over the last eight years, it all came out towards Zlaja" The gaze accompanied with the words: "Why, how dare you, Zlaja? It enshrouded him. On his face, a smile suddenly was replaced by a surprise and disbelief, he paused, shrugged his shoulders as if he could not grasp it, he turned and walked away. He stopped abruptly, stilted for a few moments. Then, Ratko, as though he saw a ghost, turned suddenly and almost ran away as far as he can from the ghost." (Redzic, Feb 2006)

Reflecting upon these encounters, survivors tell how, in exile, for many years they dreamt or fantasised how a meeting with a former friend or neighbour, might look like, and how, on such occasions, they imagined they would express "all that they think of him". However, in reality, this need was absent as the narrator realised that they no longer had an emotional attachment to the individual in question:

I imagined our meeting, most often, in a way where I would "throw out" everything I think about him. But at this point, I felt nothing for him. Friendship has long since ceased, and hatred did not, thank God, pervade me. And when one has no feeling towards another being, then, it is difficult to say anything.(Redzic, 14 March, 2006)

Redzic writes about Doctor Divna, who, in the summer of 1992, saved his 12 year old daughter's life by giving her a necessary injection despite her nurse's assertion that "these injections are for ours". He poignantly describes a meeting between his daughter, now a young adult, and the doctor. During their visit to their original home, his daughter decided to visit Divna to thank her for saving her life: "You probably do not remember me, but in ninety-two you saved my life and I came to thank you. It was everything Jasmina was able to say before she burst into tears" (26 September, 2006).

Telling the Story: Creation of a survivor and its social implications

To stay silent or to speak. If I stay silent, how moral would that be? When I remember the night I was taken out my own broken bones start to hurt. If I speak, how good is that for me? I would actually have to expose myself? ¹⁴⁷

The very act of telling creates a new identity - that of a survivor: an identity that was born out of suffering, and one that no human being would like to carry in the long run. Hence, for a witness-victim-survivor-to-be, he is undergoing another sacrifice of human worth for the purpose of what? Surely, mental wellbeing cannot be rescued through such public exposure. Why is it, then, that so much research on victims' trauma seem to focus on the healing benefits of telling a story? Does a process of story-telling bring about empathy among former enemies as some scholars suggest? Do personal narratives, or constructing one's experience into a story, imbue a teller with a sense of being in control, and of what: the self, or the story? Or does the self and the story become one, in the eyes of beholder and his public? If so, would that mean a story is commoditised? What implication, if any, does this have for the way we analyse and understand social recovery?

My findings illustrate facets of "a story" that do not correspond to normative understanding and employment of its benefits. First of all, most ordinary people are scarcely willing participants in the public dissemination of their stories of suffering, and it is often the least vociferous who suffered the most, in terms of family loss and degree of humiliation. The stories, or rather fragments of a past life, are predominantly told in the intimate atmosphere of friends and families who spontaneously share their memories, as in the community centre of *Kuca Mira*, or among the comrades of the 17th brigade in the battles. Even then, as we saw, people employ their memories as a way of creating action, either by boosting motivation among themselves, as with the soldiers, or as in the community centre, to temporarily assuage a sense of loss through humour¹⁴⁸. Conversely, the proliferation of local NGOs, encouraged by international agencies'

¹⁴⁷ Jadranka Cigelj, survivor of Omarska camp in the documentary "Calling the Ghosts", (1996) *Women Make Movies*.

¹⁴⁸ Some claim that Vietnam veterans vocalised their trauma as a solution to the hostile position they found themselves in upon their homecoming (Neal, 2005, Young, 1995). Medicalising their experience to the "stressor events", J Edkins (2003), claim not only helps the veterans but also reduces political controversies surrounding Vietnam War to questions of stress related treatments and perhaps compensation.

work on creating a civil society and a global focus on transitional justice mechanisms in post-violence societies, means that our obsession with the victims has only prolonged the groups' sense of victimhood, which might actually have a detrimental effect on the individuals concerned. The apparent centrality of the victim as a moral type (Caruth, 1996), the "walking monument" (Young in Tal, 2006) to the suffering, a "frozen survivor" (Des Pres, 1980) always in touch with his trauma, paradoxically has elided the event that preoccupies the survivor. Instead, the survivor's telling, the repetition of recalling the experience until it becomes a standardised (Ross, 2003), "mythologised" story, helps heal his individual psyche as part of a strategy for cultural forms of coping (Tal, 2006). In this way, the story is externalised and what is expected from the survivor is to utter his experience as a consumable commodity. More disturbing is that such a product is an end in itself, and it is understood by individual tellers that "the world expects them to retell, like a parrot, the same story over and over again". And yet, some persevere in such a role despite the knowledge that they feel they are "playing a parrot". Obviously, various individuals' purpose of the telling is heterogenous and may evolve over time, whilst some remain frozen in their reenactment of trauma for the audience. However, the employment of testimonies (*svjedocenja*) in various contexts, such as courts or public hearings, and within the intimacy of community, all illustrate that most survivors are mainly concerned with action that these stories might invoke. Stories as a medium for garnering social change, then, can be seen as a battle ground in which ownership is central. Hence, we see survivors contemplating how to convey a story as opposed to simply telling it in order to achieve their own aims (Zimmerman, 2000:75).

Since the nineteenth century, and with the passing of the English law that compensated workers who were injured at work and suffered trauma demonstrated by their inability to return to work for a period (Meierhnrich, 2007), narrating one's experience of work injury became a way to claim financial and other benefits such as delaying going back to work. During the First World War, soldiers' experience of "shell shock" was regarded by the medical establishment at the time as cowardice, claiming that many invented their trauma in order to withdraw from the frontline. All they had to do, they believed, was to beat the illusion out of the patient by applying electrical current, which would result in the patient's acknowledgment of their own phoney behaviour. This treatment of soldiers, of course, was practiced within the context of a global war where patriotic and

collective effort was regarded as a necessity, whilst individual concerns were seen as selfish. After the First World War, with the persistence of the soldiers' syndrome, some psychiatrists and psychoanalysts argued for a new way of treatment based on listening to the patient's experience and working through his deeply held convictions. The unprecedented destruction of European Jewry in the Second World War, albeit recognised in belatedly, coupled later with the Vietnam War veterans' struggle to reintegrate into normal life, changed the way we perceive a survivor. A survivor's trauma was no longer "a suspicion" but rather a true experience, a moral compass to the suffering that reverberated across the world, and a warning to us not to let it happen again (Ibid, 2007).

Immeasurable research on the effects of Holocaust on its survivors, their successive generations, and our own understanding of the historical event has been widely and critically discussed in the literature. The enormity of violence, the huge death toll and the survivors' suffering could not percolate into a world that, immediately after the war, had neither the time nor the will to face up to the legacy of the Second World War. Indeed, it was only after the Vietnam War, with the problematic homecoming of American soldiers, and the social movements of the sixties that demanded rights for the veterans and women who suffered violence, that the so-called "conspiracy of silence" was broken. The excessive feelings of anger, chronic depression, a sense of loss, and inability to re-enter normal life, all meant that survivors needed acknowledgment of their suffering, but also help in facing the past and coping with the present. In search of healing, the outside intervention in a survivor's life began to be used on a grand scale, from psychoanalysts' healing through speaking, to analysing the trans-generational transmission of traumatic memories, and so forth. Thus, theoretical complexities emerged surrounding notions of trauma from the individual psyche to the collective, and recent claims for the universalisation of trauma as a "hidden wound", or a "traumatic kernel" in all societies waiting to emerge. Individual experience that culminated in post traumatic syndrome had been widely observed as "scars", "wounds" of collective memory found in the form of narration (Brockmeier, 2001) and memorial practices (Young, 1994).

The Truth and Reconciliation commission in South Africa had a significant impact in supporting the idea of potential healing through testimonies. Those who have argued for such processes have claimed that the commission gave a voice to the voiceless (Hamilton et al., 2002). Through narrating their suffering, one was able to take control of their experience, but also claim their agency. The critics have pointed out that public hearings and the immense interest from media and researchers meant that the story was interpreted, over analysed “in search for meaning” and gradually re-shaped by reception in the audience (Ross, 2003, Colvin, 2002). As a result, the narrator lost their hold over it. Moreover, the need for a coherent story meant that survivors were asked to narrate in a certain way so, eventually, the story became “formulaic”, standardised for the consumption of a larger audience (Ross, 2003). Acting as an interpreter to scholars or journalists, I have encountered similar standardised stories among survivors in Kozarac. On several occasions, if a narrator was not following what was expected from him, an impatient interviewer would ask a survivor to move to “his experience of the camp rather than dwell on the experiences of those who were murdered”. I recently asked a survivor whether he was aware of the interviewer’s impatience, and attempt to direct the witness. He said that he was fully aware what she wanted from him, but he ignored it as he wanted to tell the story of his schoolmate’s disappearance first. He asserted that the story of his friend’s death is part of his own story, and therefore he could not avoid mentioning it.

Langer (2006:99) has written about the voice of the dead being more present than that of the survivor, interpreting this as a survivor’s inability to grapple with their own self in a coherent manner as opposed to the incoherence, shards of memory, that result from the real scale of trauma suffered (Tal, 1996). As a result, testimonies need a professional to interpret them for the benefit of the survivor’s sense-making, but also the wider public. He makes a point that a survivor occupies a liminal place, always on the move between the common and deep memory, based on the Auschwitz survivor Delbo’s notion of memories in between.

Reading Delbo, Levy and the Bosnian autobiographical works, I am not convinced that the ultimate desire of the survivor is to be able to communicate his experience and be understood. As many Bosniak survivors, among themselves, would concede that those

who have not undergone such experience cannot possibly understand it. Why then, persevere in the telling? I believe the answer lies in the survivor's need to change the circumstances in which crimes were made possible, but also a hope to prevent similar events occurring in the future. As Levy once remarked: "it happened, therefore it can happen again: this is the core of what we want to say". The ghosts of the dead¹⁴⁹ appear in the narratives of many families that lost their relatives and friends. However, as we saw in this part of thesis, each individual makes their own way of managing loss and their traumatic experience, depending on various factors such as personal disposition, a complex social, political and cultural context, and their hopes for the future generation. The Bosnian survivor in question made a conscious decision to "keep the ghosts alive", as they keep him going towards achieving the memorialisation of the Omarska camp. Telling his story to an English television journalist, for him meant raising public awareness that the Omarska camp has not been commemorated despite the gruesome history of its past, and publicly arguing that the International mining company is reluctant to support the victims. As with his motives, survivors often tell their story in order to call for action. As Brockmeier (2001) contended, telling a story is not healing, it is a risk. In the documentary, "Calling the Ghosts", two women survivors of Omarska, Nusreta Sivac and Jadranka Cigelj, manage to tell their story of rape without necessarily just telling it as evidence of rape crimes in Bosnia. In other words, the documentary is carefully structured so that Sivac and Cigelj "relocate their own rape within their legal and political effort" (Zimmerman, 2000) to bring the issue of rape to the Hague Tribunal. This is achieved by survivors' contemplation on "how to speak" once the choice of speaking or silencing is made, rather of "simply to tell" (Ibid:75). Thus, a dedication of the film to those five women who were murdered in the camp refers to the victims' fidelity to the dead. Testimonies and witnessing, as Stover opines, are the way to integrate the dead in the present but also to function as a future archive (Stover, 2005).

Conversely, for many outsiders I encountered in the field, "re-enacting of trauma" practiced through the telling, resembles a voyeuristic pursuit, or appropriation of the experience through which some believe they can "heal" the teller, as if their listening

149 See work of the anthropologist H. Kwon on Vietnam and the "wandering soul of the dead" that in some instances can help the living find a way to manage their past and incorporate it within one's "completeness".

capacity will relieve the traumatised victim. I have observed various, almost ritualised, encounters in which foreign groups practice music therapy, with a spiritual musician claiming to have been called by “a higher force” to come to Bosnia and heal the spirits. My experience informs me that their “encounter with the real” is often instigated by their perception of the victims’ trauma as fixed - a permanent survivor. A small group of locals, particularly elderly women, who miss the social life they once shared with their neighbours, are happy to participate. During the annual visit to Omarska camp on the 24th of May 2010, as has become the norm, British women and their Bosnian counterparts visit the White House, and over the last couple of years, I have observed a ritual in which spiritual healing is practiced. At first, we spend a few minutes freely wandering through four small rooms that comprised the building. A woman survivor is then asked to “tell them something that you have experienced while in the camp”. The camera is then switched on, and the survivor is seated in the only available broken chair - once used for torture, and the only object left in the building. Immediately after her story, a musician begins playing her instrument, whilst all other participants are asked to remain silent in order to experience the healing.

Similarly, as in the mediation process, survivors are often asked to tell their story in front of a handful of Serb youth or a foreign journalist, or any person that showed an interest to hear. This “demand”, as it were, from the foreign intervention, for a survivor to recall his or her experience, could not be defined as a healing experience or assisting in a social repair of locale. In fact, recall can bring the most vulnerable, those who tell the story, to a state of emotional turmoil, and in some cases, put their life at risk. For example, in their book, SoE describe an event in which Rezak Hukanovic showed a short documentary of his experiences to the SoE team in which, at the time, a Serb refugee from Croatia, and a former soldier, was present. For the purpose of the mediation, this seemed a perfectly normal gathering where a story was supposed to be heard and discussed. My interlocutor observed a discussion, as he recalls, in which heated debate ensued regarding who was to blame for the start of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. The Serb, from Knin, was blaming Croats and the subsequent wish of the Bosniaks not to remain in a rump Yugoslavia once it was clear that Croatia and Slovenia were leaving. According to him, there was no sense of empathy nor remorse in hearing a gruesome story of a human life that suffered in the White House. The

following day, Rezak's car was blown up in front of his house (Pelz&Reeves, 2009:183). I was surprised to read about this, and more importantly to note that the report did not consider a possible causal effect of the previous night's dispute, apart from a mere comment that indeed sporadic violence "among the groups are still present". In the imposed reconciliation practice, then, the two sides, at some point, must be equated regardless of the realities of asymmetrical power structures, and the language employed in these cases has a quasi-religious quality, with victim and perpetrator alike requires to forgive and repent. This religious understanding of reconciliation is often criticised, but it persists as a feature of international intervention in post-conflict societies. One might argue, as some scholars have noted, the notion of reconciliation is so ambiguous and broad that "stretching the concept" resulted in applying it to many places where it might not necessarily be appropriate at all (Meierhnrich, 2007).

An Experience of Telling: The "Torture of Witnessing"

A friend once told me a story of her experience as a witness at the Hague Tribunal. After playing an important role in helping rape to become recognised as a war crime under international law, she was becoming tired of what she called the 'torture of witnessing'. She conceded that her mind and body could not take much more of these processes, but it was her duty to those who "are not among us" that gave her a desire to bring war criminals to justice despite the cost to her personally(Stover, 2005). During one of her testimonies, she recalled how after telling of her experience of Omarska, a story that overwhelmingly expressed lack of any control of violence committed by those in charge and their subordinates, a judge asked her why she did not demonstrate against such treatment to those in charge? She told me how, in her mind, at that very moment, she imagined a placard in her hand saying "stop killing us" in the midst of orgies of brutal beatings and corpse burnings in the yard that she was often made to watch from one of the office windows, after being raped by the men in charge. The disparity between what the story wants to achieve and what it is actually used for is a wide gulf. In Cambodia's truth commission, an anthropologist recently stated that the court's language insensitivity and ambiguousness towards the victims' needs provide a skewed understanding of how the court is working to those who are asked to give their

testimonies (Hinton, 2009). For example, if the teller is recounting the story of a missing loved one, they may emphasise their need for help in finding them, but this is irrelevant to a judicial process that considers only the guilt or otherwise of the accused.

In the story of my friend, there is an important implication to be drawn. Whilst we all concur with the innocence of those injured in the upheaval of war, there sometimes lingers a feeling or a thought of a victim's position and their action in it. Perhaps, in a judicial system, one has to ask questions that might, in the eyes of a witness, sound entirely insensitive or absurd (Dembour&Haslam, 2004). But do the restorative mechanics of dealing with past wrongs operate in the same way? From the SoE mediation process, one can see certain aspects of "silencing" the story of a survivor, so as not to disturb or offend those from whom compromise on a memorial depends, as the case of Nusreta Sivac being denied the opportunity to address the conference in Banja Luka illustrates. There are a number of examples in which various survivors felt not listened to, and claimed that despite the fact that mediators asserted it was not "their" memorial, in fact they were fully in charge of the workshops and discussions. Satko, for example, recalled to me, how he sat with SoE in Kozarac and as background story to his camp experience, showed them a picture of his emaciated body during his incarceration. He said they hardly noticed it, and just moved it to the side of the table, continuing to speak about what needs to be done. Borneman has claimed that for a story to have influence, it needs an active listener, someone open to empathise, and preferably an audience from the perpetrators' side. But what does an active listener entail? Does that mean an ability to be quiet whilst another human being is recounting his experience, or some form of emotional expression of solidarity? How can we evaluate when the story is truly heard?

Weinstein and Stover (2007), have both argued for the importance of transitional justice mechanisms to take into consideration local dynamics, and the context in which various actors position themselves. In particular, they stressed the need for learning from local communities rather than imposing theoretical ideas or one's own reading of a particular situation. In order to understand it, they contend, one ought to be grounded in the local vernacular and the ways of being. But is that ever entirely possible? Or does one

position or view become the dominant discourse through our own intersubjectivity, and if so, why does one prevail over the other?

The Futility of a Violent Story

In the early days of my fieldwork, my methodology was not to conduct any formal interviews, but rather to explain my research in a communal gathering. Communal life in Kozarac is very intimate and small, and they all knew why I was present, so I would often sit among the women in the *Kuca Mira* and listen to their daily conversations. Visitors from Prijedor or remote villages, on hearing of my presence, would give me gory details of the past, lasting often several hours with no interruption. The small group of regular visitors would listen at first, but very quickly start to converse among themselves, fully enthralled in their daily gossip about happenings in the “*carsija*”. On one occasion, a friend of mine came looking for me and rushed me out of the room, interrupting a woman’s story of a very gruesome murder in the wake of ethnic cleansing. She looked at me with pity as she could see that my head was filled with “*teske price*” (heavy stories) and gave me advice to ignore those stories as “they do nothing useful”. We spoke for a while about testimonies and the dissemination of violent stories among members of the community and what purpose(s) they serve. She concluded with “*svi smo mi ludi*” (we are all mad). Of course, I knew that such a statement need not be taken literally, but over the course of a few years, I have come to believe that the statement was meant to encapsulate the experience of trauma on a communal level. Specifically, “we are all mad” intended to explain what cannot be understood among themselves with regard to the way in which suffering is exploited, publicly, by individuals and communal leaders, without adherence to the previous prewar tradition that “*prljavi ves*” (dirty laundry) remains within the family home. And, whilst violence obliterates a worldview of those who suffered, there is a need among those attempting to build a communal life to restore a sense of moral and traditional values in which private aspects of individual life return to their previous (intimate) state. Although most inhabitants of Kozarac have stories of loss and violence to tell, a decade after return, many feel the need to move on by letting these stories take on the past tense. However, NGOs working in the human rights field, and individuals

that remain public speakers of “stories of violence” remain active in propagating the communal victimhood.

Narratives of violence serve various purposes. For some, talking about it relieves the burden of the past, albeit temporarily, whilst for others it is powerful enough to create action when needed. For others, it remains a personal, private story never to be told. I recall a talk with an informant who spoke of a middle-aged lady, a survivor of Omarska, who never spoke about her experience as she was acutely aware that some of her women inmates were far too willing to tell their story to anyone, and in such detail that she claimed those stories degraded her and those who did not survive. I was asked if I was willing to interview her to create a record of her experience, but I declined. I felt that the woman was in charge of her past and any conversation about it would eventually resemble or act as a “reminder” of those stories that made her feel repulsed. After all, every individual does not have a need to tell their story. My findings show that, in the public context, agents of telling are usually those in charge of various NGOs, survivors that remain in exile, and those who are obliged, or feel a duty to help, like those women in The Peace Centre (*Kuca Mira*). During the international workshops in the *Kuca Mira*, women are asked to contribute to a seminar. It usually ranges from cooking to personal stories of survival, albeit, in recent years, only a handful are willing participants. Even those are never entirely willing, but rather feel a duty to those in charge of the communal activities. Prior to those events, tensions among various volunteers for the workshops would peak as they would argue whose turn it was, this year, to do various chores such as preparing food or finding “willing” speakers or attendees for the workshop. What never ceased to surprise me is that as soon as you leave the Centre, and walk down the main road, another world is revealed, in which the happenings in the Peace Centre are entirely irrelevant and yet also present. In the summer months, it is a world of partying for the annual visit to their homeland for the diaspora. In that period, cafes and restaurants are full with young and old eager to relax and enjoy themselves.

The disturbing aspect of these stories is that many of them can easily be understood as a commodity, part of an exchange between foreign and local NGOs where individual survivors are part of the deal. There are all kinds of moral hazard and unforeseen

consequences in this process, such as who is chosen and why, and does this mean their story is more important than somebody else's who does not participate in the same way? This kind of story telling is also highly variable in character and impact, depending on the context in which the stories are told, but also on the teller's way of narrating, and of course the listener. So, a visitor from Prijedor, who perceives me as an outsider, tells me the details of the massacre; a woman working or attending seminars and coffee gatherings at the Peace Centre feels obliged to 'do her bit' for community centre. I, myself, was put in an awkward position where I was asked to take a group of Danish women charity workers who brought second-hand furniture to the Peace Centre to the *sehidsko mezarje* - the cemetery of martyrs. En route, I was supposed to give a short history of the expulsion of Kozarac, and once in the cemetery, to tell them a story of a murder of a family whilst standing next to their gravestones. The tour did not take into consideration the fact that Danish women were more interested in dropping off their second-hand furniture and as they say "bringing freedom and democracy to the local women". Afterwards, they anticipated a visit to beautiful Mount Kozara for some rest before driving back to Denmark. However, before the visit to the Mountain, the trip to the cemetery was obligatory. These types of mis-matched motives and intentions are ever-present in the work of the *Kuca Mira*.

The trajectory of a story cannot be either controlled or determined once it is released into the public realm. And, yet, the effects on the victims are potentially serious. A year after the mediation project ceased to exist, and the survivors and their families continue to debate its impact on the community, there was a conference in Malta intended as another attempt to bring the issue of a memorial to the fore. I was asked by a survivor connected with this initiative to attend with a small group of Bosniaks. I was unable to get much information about what the focus of the conference; however, several of my British friends who attend "conferences on Bosnia" were able to get more information from a British charity and a woman in charge, Kate. It was an international conference on healing that was arranged prior to any Bosnian focus, but once Kate met a Bosnian survivor in London and heard his story of Omarska and the struggle over the right to commemorate, she decided to incorporate it within the conference.

When I arrived in Malta, I was taken by a young psychologist to a house where the rest of the Bosniak participants were staying. What struck me in my initial contact with the organisers was that they were not interested in who I was or why I was participating in this conference. The next day, this became clear: we, the Bosniaks, were all to play the role of survivors, in one way or another. Upon our arrival at a hotel where all other participants were staying, we were told that the psychologist would be there to assist us at any time, should that be required. Our group consisted of Edin Ramulic, from *Izvor*, Sacha, two survivors (Mirza and Hamdija) and myself. As Mirza was the main contact of Kate, and himself chose the people in group, we naturally asked him what the conference was about. We understood that Mittal people would be present, and that there might be discussions about the Omarska memorial. From the start, it became clear we were to have “special treatment” as a group of survivors. For example, any attempt to go to the restrooms alone was doomed to fail, as the psychologist would make sure to accompany each of us, in case we needed her help. I was soon sufficiently irritated to have a private talk with the psychologist. I learnt that, as a child, she suffered sexual abuse in her family and was determined to help others. However, after our conversation, I was free to wander around the conference without professional assistance.

Another way of emphasising our status as “victims of trauma”¹⁵⁰ was in the way we were coached to enter the conference room. We were asked to wait for all participants to take their seats and then our psychologist would invite us in. A back corner of the room was allocated for us, and upon entering the room, the participants’ gaze turned towards us. It felt as though they knew something we did not. The conference was opened by a British woman, Kate and her daughter talking about their life tragedies, and how they learnt to overcome them, and as a result why they founded a charity that helps others work through their trauma. Whilst the atmosphere was high on a note of self-healing, as the main aim of the conference, our group was desperately trying to remain quiet as our own discussion was not only trivial, but permeated with humour that was hard to hold back. Sacha was looking at the daughter, noticing her beautiful dark hair and wondering how she manages to keep it so shiny, which made us laugh. Meanwhile a famous

150 I use this term instead of traumatised victims as victims of trauma stresses the focus on trauma as a symptom that needs to be healed rather than the victims who might be more inclined to be “seen”, recognised to have suffered as a targeted group and desire to see social change that might assuage the sense of injustice so embodied in the experiences of victimhood.

American psychologist began “a puppet show” in which he described how to regain self-worth. Although we were entertained, we could not fathom what all this had to do with us. Mirza was listening to the psychologist, trying to take on board his advice for personal growth. The rest of us either did not understand English, or were too bored, so we had our own little conversations until Mirza was asked to speak.

Apart from us, most conference participants seemed to consist of international middle-aged women in search of healing. So when Mirza spoke for nearly two hours about his experience of the camp, projecting an aura of helplessness, an impatient Danish woman interrupted him by saying “why did you not do anything about your own life?” It was a rare story telling by the survivor of a camp in which someone from the audience dared to stop the story unfolding. The sudden interruption meant that Mirza reached for an explicit explanation of his miserable state in the camp, so much so that several women began to cry and all finished in a ritual of embrace and a shared feeling of disempowerment. The rest of the day continued with advice and training given by the American psychologist on self-healing.

Meanwhile, we were trying to identify Mittal’s group. We all were certain they were sitting in the front row. In anticipation that they may be as confused as us, we looked for signs of movement and bewilderments among participants. Over the course of lunch we learnt who the representatives of Mittal were, but, due to our special status, we were kept at a distance from them. In the next couple of days, we learned that Kate was a possible candidate for the mediation role vacated by Soul of Europe, and she wanted to make clear how “traumatised” and “needy” the survivors really are, requiring an organisation such as hers to be able to negotiate and interpret both their side and that of Mittal Steel. Leaving the international women groups in a separate room to continue their discussion with the American doctor, we took our group, Mittal and Kate and others interested in a room to begin dialogue. Mittal’s Bosnian representative in charge of the mines at Omarska¹⁵¹ and Zenica (Central Bosnia), together with Managers from Luxembourg, were to sit opposite us. In the middle was Kate, who seemingly would act

151 In conversation with Mittal Omarska mine managers, I learnt that they had no idea why they were invited nor did they regard issues concerning memorial as anything important or to do with their own position within Mittal mining company. They were asked to be present and that is what they were doing. The discussions we had were mainly related to finding a way to enjoy the break by playing tennis, visiting galleries and exchanging experiences about holidays.

as a mediator, explaining to each side what the other was saying. In practice, it meant the survivors telling their frustration, pain and incomprehension over the memorial struggle and hoping for some response from Mittal. It became a travesty of mediation. In the evenings, we were all very tense and could not grasp the relevance of the conference. Unable to sleep, several of us would begin discussing the overwhelming sense of “not being in charge” and being easily led by foreign mediators, and the Malta conference for us encapsulated the survivors’ feeling of general bewilderment about the way in which outside parties try to engage with our situation. In the end, we decided to approach Mittal’s delegates alone, and explain that the conference organisers had not been asked “to heal the survivors” - indeed the survivors did not know what the conference was going to be about until it began. Upon hearing that we met Mittal without them, the organisers were furious, as they claimed that the survivors alone were unable to communicate their needs to Mittal. A few days after the conference, a letter was sent to Mittal claiming that there was no need for more mediation, whilst Kate was informed that her expertise would not be needed.

There are two aspects of the conference that emerged in relation to this story. First of all, the equation of the story telling with healing. The organisers, as the candidate for a mediation project, had approached Mittal to fund a conference in which an American psychotherapist would provide healing for the survivors. To most of the Bosniak participants, this was not made clear. The implication was that the healing would contribute to finding a solution to the memorial that would not risk the business relationship between Mittal Steel and the Serb government that retains forty-nine percent of the Omarska mining company. Similarly, the Soul of Europe’s original mediation had been concerned that “destructive elements” might be present within the community of Kozarac, as its inhabitants were former detainees of the camps. As a result, the process carefully chose those who were supportive of the project, whilst defining critical individuals as “spoilers”, regardless of their suffering or their right to participate in some capacity, as survivors of Omarska. The latter were compared to the Serb nationalists and the camp deniers, on the basis that both exhibited negative and rigid emotions, such as anger, revenge and an unreadiness to find a solution under the framework of reconciliation. However, those who have given their “voice” to the SoE process, like *Srcem do Mira*, Nusreta Sivac and others, all say they were treated well

and listened to by the foreign mediators, but when asked what they actually did, the response was they had “told the story” of their experience in the camp to various groups, from a small number of Serb youth to BBC journalists and other media outlets that were asked to cover the story of (imposed) reconciliation. The participants were asked to take various groups to the site of the camp and tell individual stories of suffering. The expected narration of suffering is so intimately interwoven within the community sense of suffering, that is nearly impossible to hear a story, in public, that does not sound the same. Of course, this is partly due to the nature of suffering and the specificity of the event in which, more or less, every individual from Kozarac suffered a similar fate. On the other hand, scholars critical of narratives as a source of reclaiming the self or rebuilding the social body after violence, claim the repetition of a story demands a coherence from the audience, courts and truth commissions, who then decipher the meanings through interpretation depending on the context in which such a story is told, but also its political or social use (Ross 2003, Tal 1996). The social ramifications of the story telling, for those who tell it, are rarely explored (Ross 2003). In the SoE project, the story telling was supposed to heal the perpetrators’ side by softening their preconceptions regarding the “Bosniak side” and thus garnering empathetic mutual understanding that will bring about social transformation. In bringing the enemies together, as it were, scholars have often claimed that “contact” is the best form of building bridges or pathways to reconciliation, as it ostensibly breaks down prejudices and other forms of discrimination.

Conclusion

Re-making Kozarac

Creating conditions where people would think about the future rather than be concerned in which entity or under which flag we live... That already exists, it was signed by our politicians in Dayton... And, at the end of the day, this is Bosnia and we need to be in a situation where they are looking for jobs from us, but let me be clear, I hate Serbs for what they did in 1992, but some [Serb youngster] is not guilty of what happened. Those who are, they need to be punished, but the rest of us, let us work and live a normal life.¹⁵²

The experience of trauma was key to the motivation of the 17th Brigade, and later the wider group of returnees, who decided to brave the hostility of RS to re-establish the town of Kozarac after it had been razed to the ground at the start of ethnic cleansing in 1992. The agency, discipline and belief that the Brigade created was vital to believing that return was possible. After the war, the focus shifted from fighting their way home to negotiating their way home, and the returnees focused on rebuilding homes and identifying the missing. Later, they became more active politically, and demanded the right to represent and have acknowledged their suffering at the hands of the Serb authorities in 1992. But the majority of the town is not part of the NGO and local political world, and in some respects see this as stuck in the past, and even negative. There is wide support for remembering Omarksa and commemorating the dead, for example, but that does not mean that most people connected with the town want to get drawn into a difficult and complex world of organisations and often quite personal politics.

Without the bravery of the early returnees, and those who remain committed to fighting for the town on a political level, there would arguably be no Kozarac today, but the population is now finding a new balance between protecting their community and getting on with their lives, which involves almost daily compromises and negotiation of complexity posed by the local environment; this is perhaps where reconciliation takes place, not in set-piece international projects with mediators and political figures. The re-

¹⁵² Fieldnote, local businessman, April 2008.

making of Kozarac is a story of self-reliance and resourcefulness, as much as it is about victimhood, and of bottom-up organisation and initiative. International agencies have helped in some areas, and the role of the womens' networks around *Srcem do Mira* has been very important. But on the whole, where foreign charities or agencies have intervened without a deep knowledge of and connection with the town, they have failed to make a positive contribution. Indeed, in at least one example, the net result has probably been to increase divisions, rather than to heal them.

It has been fascinating to watch how local people have undertaken the challenge of re-making the town over many years, whilst at the same time negotiating their own private and communal memory of trauma, which is almost completely ignored and even denied by the accepted, official public memory of the the entity in which they live. NGOs, activists and the families of the missing have been most closely involved, but through the Internet and annual visits to the town, the diaspora has played a huge role, especially in developing local businesses and creating jobs.

On an institutional level, there was perhaps a lack of experience with this kind of contested return project, and it seems the speed of return took international agencies by surprise after the end of the war. If we are to better understand communities like Kozarac, the field of Transitional Justice probably needs to engage much more deeply not only with individuals and their suffering, but also the social context and social networks that surround them, if it is to truly understand how people cope with such situations. This would undoubtedly improve the quality of interventions, and create a more collaborative relationship between a returnee community and the international agencies that are involved in post-war reconstruction. Those who were expelled and want to return, or whose families were killed and want to remember, should be at the heart of the process, rather than passive recipients of assistance.

The future for Kozarac will hopefully become more concerned with economic and social development than fighting for its right to be recognised, and this will require an entirely new generation of people who can organise new institutions and build successful companies.

During my research, I sometimes wondered whether the “community of mourners” in Kozarac would eventually be able to accommodate alternative ways of dealing with the legacy of the war. Despite the pervasive sense of victimhood in the town, there are many people with an entirely different way of thinking, like my friend, who warned me not to “fill my head with stories of violence.” Youngsters whom I interviewed for an article about the experience of returnees at schools, told me about their disappointment with the local leaders, who hung on to their positions, meaning the next generation could only hope to become hairdressers and waitresses, serving the diaspora during the summer, or translators at the House of Peace, when foreign delegations arrive. Many of these children claim that they did not face much discrimination at school, and they were able to deal with it if they did. Their relationship with the region, and with RS, is quite different to that of their parents.¹⁵³

In conversation with a returnee from Austria, who opened a company in Kozarac, I learned about a small group of educated younger people who are striving to achieve a normal life in order to break from the past, and they perceive the NGO culture as “cancerous”, keeping alive the narrative of victimhood, with no way out. Eno¹⁵⁴ spoke to me about his vision for life in Kozarac, where a family would be able to support itself, like anywhere else, and go twice a year on holiday rather than just dwell on the past. He employs over fifty people locally, and his company is successful, offering people a future that means nationalism and the legacy of war start to fade away. It is not a question of whether one hates Serbs, or whether one can forget the past; according to him, forgetting is impossible and of course hating those who committed crimes is to be expected¹⁵⁵. But this should not influence our relationship with the other Serbs who were not involved. In Kozarac, he believes, the priority is sustainable return, with real social and economical progress. Eno goes to parties outside Kozarac, to Prijedor and Banja Luka, with his Serb colleagues and employees, and he brings Serbs to Kozarac to show that it is not the “*mudjahirija*” that some might think.

¹⁵³ Fieldnotes, April, 19, 2008.

¹⁵⁴ During the war, Eno was in charge of a logistic centre in Austria for the 17th brigade movement.

¹⁵⁵ Judith Herman has claimed the fantasy of vengeful victim is omnipresent. In reality, referring to Orwell’s “revenge is sour”, the victim only feels vengeful when he is powerless. At a conference, “Beyond Reconciliation”, Cape Town, December 2009.

The experience of war and the struggle for return have fostered group affiliations and strong personal bonds (Pickering, 2007) among those involved. These processes and social relations were necessary in times of war, but arguably what is needed now is many more “weaker links”¹⁵⁶ with others if the inhabitants of Kozarac are to reintegrate within the wider community, rather than remain “an island in RS”. To some extent, the NGOs are engaged in a process of carving new pathways to social relations, but these ideas are still mainly initiated and developed in relation to international projects and funding. Real reconciliation discourse is absent, as there is no social consensus regarding the recent past. The main political discourse remains one of division and fear. In RS, President Milorad Dodik continues to deny the crimes suffered by people in Kozarac, and encourages the rhetoric of “we all have suffered equally,” and therefore need to move on - or as the Mayor of Prijedor reiterates: “we have agreed to leave the past behind”. Funeral rituals remain the focus of Bosniak desires to remember the recent past, which is unsurprising given that a thousand missing people are still to be identified after all this time. The families of the missing are left with their own “internal graves” that do not give them an opportunity to externalise their loss. In contrast to the slow pain of the victims, many war criminals have already served their short sentences and returned to the Prijedor region. In such a social context, where denial remains strong and the victims continue to search for their loved ones, it is understandable that many people are not able or ready to “move on”. I believe that the community of Kozarac has come to accept their estrangement from the municipality, but they have not yet found a long-term strategy that could give new generations a better opportunity. Or perhaps, the new community will continue to operate as a place of no social or institutional power, but supported by the economic power of the diaspora, albeit without leaders who might create a social network that create institutions of permanence.

156 Several survivors and returnees have reconnected with former school mates from the “other” side. Initially they did not think much of it, mainly they were curious about their life now. However, once their former friends showed remorse for their suffering and recognised the crimes that had taken place in summer 1992, they have been attending together annual visits to former Omarska camp. Some are considering speaking publicly but the social and political climate in Prijedor, like anywhere else in Bosnia, remains fragile.

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A list of Prijedor's non-Serb intellectuals who were killed as part of the Serbian campaign of ethnic cleansing in the area

- 1 Ismet Ajkic, lawyer
- 2 Enver Alagic, economist
- 3 Mirsad Alisic, detective chief inspector
- 4 Enes Bajramovic, engineer
- 5 Nedzad Bajramovic, economist
- 6 Husein Basic, economist
- 7 dr Eniz Begic, urologist
- 8 Latif Benic, professor
- 9 Mugbila Besirevic, economist
- 10 Zlatan Besirevic, economist
- 11 dr Kemal Ceric, microbiologist
- 12 Uzeir Crnic, professor
- 13 Esef Crnkic, electro engineer
- 14 Husein Crnkic, professor
- 15 Muhamed Cehajic, professor
- 16 Zaim Hamulic, economist
- 17 Mersud Hamzic, professor
- 18 Besim Hergic, professor
- 19 Hilmija Jakupovic, economist
- 20 Idriz Jakupovic, social worker
- 21 Mehmedalija Kapetanovic, professor
- 22 Antonije Komsic, civil engineer
- 23 Hidajet Kulenovic, professor
- 24 Dr Osman Mahmuljin, specialist in internal medicine
- 25 Velida Mahmuljin, teacher
- 26 Zijad Mahmuljin, economist
- 27 Stjepan Maric, electro engineer
- 28 Tomislav Matanovic, catholic priest
- 29 Becir Medunjanin, teacher
- 30 Sadeta Medunjanin, teacher
- 31 Esad Mehmedagic, judge
- 32 Mehmed Mesic, economist
- 33 Fikret Mujakic, professor
- 34 Senad Mujkanovic, engineer

- 35 Ilijaz Music, professor
- 36 Dr Razim Music, specialist for skin diseases
- 37 Nedzad Omanovic, economist
- 38 Dr Jusuf Pasic, specialist in family medicine
- 39 Ibrahim Paunovic, engineer
- 40 Ivica Peretin, music teacher
- 41 Abdulah Puskar, professor
- 42 Ahmed Sadikovic, lawyer
- 43 Dr Esad Sadikovic, ear–nose and throat specialist, a UN expert
- 44 Mehmedalija Sarajlic, geo engineer
- 45 Dr Zeljko Sikora, gynecologist
- 46 Dr Rufad Suljanovic, specialist in family medicine
- 47 Silvio Saric, lawyer
- 48 Mustafa Tadzic, professor
- 49 Mehmed Tursic, economist
- 50 Emir Vojnikov, economist
- 51 Enes Zahirovic, engineer
- 52 Emir Zahirovic, graphic designer
- 53 Sefik Drobac, engineer
- 54 Omer Kerenovic, judge
- 55 Nedzad Seric, lawyer

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